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SC Judge flags excessive use of UAPA

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BUSINESS

Investors lost Rs 48.29L crore since Iran war started

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SPORTS

I don't like it: Axar on Impact Player rule in IPL

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Crisis from war will persist for a long time: Modi

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday warned that the ongoing West Asia conflict will persist for a long period, urging the nation to remain prepared and united, much like during the Covid-19 pandemic. Modi likened the war crisis to Covid-19 twice in his speech

Addressing the Lok Sabha, Modi outlined the potential impact of the crisis on fuel, fertilisers, national security and Indian nationals in the region, while emphasising efforts to ensure that "ordinary families face as little trouble as possible". He called for a unified message from Parliament to the world on the crisis.

Reiterating India's commitment to peace, he said dialogue and diplomacy remain the only viable path, with India actively engaging regional leaders to de-escalate tensions. He termed attacks on commercial shipping and disruption of key routes such as the Strait of Hormuz—through which nearly 20 per cent of global energy supplies pass—as "wholly unacceptable".

'India's strategic oil reserves are about two-thirds full'

Modi said India has facilitated the safe passage of its ships, with several recently returning despite the conflict. He also warned of internal security risks, stating that agencies have been placed on high alert and security strengthened across coastal, border, cyber and strategic domains.

The Prime Minister urged vigilance against misinformation, hoarding and black-marketing, calling on states to act firmly against such elements.

Highlighting preparedness, he said India has diversified energy imports from 27 to 41 countries and maintains over 5.3 million metric tonnes of strategic petroleum reserves, with additional capacity planned. With nearly one crore Indians living in Gulf countries, Modi noted India's heightened concerns. He added that over 3.75 lakh citizens have returned safely so far. Despite global economic pressures, he said India remains secure on food and power, backed by strong grain stocks and adequate coal reserves. —*PTI*

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—PTI

Two Indian LPG tankers cross Hormuz safely

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Two Indian-flagged LPG tankers, Pine Gas and Jag Vasant, successfully navigated the war-affected Strait of Hormuz, expected to reach Indian shores within two days. The vessels, carrying about 92,000 tonnes of LPG, started from the Persian Gulf on Monday morning and sailed between Iran's Larak and Qeshm islands, possibly for verification. Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary, said, "The movement has started," without revealing their final destination. These ships are among 22 Indian vessels stranded after the Middle East conflict nearly closed the Strait, a crucial waterway connecting Gulf oil and gas to the world. —*PTI*

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Mysterious blast rocks J&K's Samba

JAMMU, 23 MARCH

A mysterious blast outside the house of a former sarpanch in Samba district early Monday shook the neighbourhood, officials said. The blast, whose origins are yet not known, occurred outside the residence of Jai Ram Sharma in Gawala Talab, some 10km from the International Border in the Ghagwal sector, they said.

The blast damaged the house's gate, a portion of the boundary wall, and shattered window panes of several adjoining houses. No casualties were reported. Teams of the National Investigation Agency and the National Security Guard, accompanied by sniffer dogs, also visited the blast site.

A FIR has been lodged. —*PTI*

22 hospitalised after chemical leak in M'rashtra factory

CHENNAI, 23 MARCH

As many as 22 workers were hospitalised following a chemical leak at the Tarapur MIDC unit in Palghar's Boisar area following the similar incident that occurred 20 days ago on 2 March in which 2,600 people had to be evacuated. The incident occurred at 1.45 pm on Sunday during the transfer of di-methyl sulphate (DMS) into a tanker. According to Collector Indu Rani Jakhad, "A quantity of the chemical overflowed from the tanker's vent line and spilled onto the ground. The chemical was neutralised using lime and soda ash by 2:30pm." Workers experienced eye irritation reported to be stable. —*PTI*

EC letter with BJP seal sparks row, EC calls it clerical error

T'PURAM, 23 MARCH

A political row erupted after a letter from the Election Commission was found bearing the BJP Kerala seal, provoking sharp reactions from CPI(M) and Congress. The CPI(M) flagged the issue on social media, sharing an affidavit attached to a 2019 letter sent to political parties that bore the BJP Kerala seal instead of the EC's official seal. EC stated it was "purely a clerical error" . CPI(M) questioned whether "all pretences have been dropped by the BJP," alleging control over both bodies. Congress questioned, "Are you operating out of BJP's office?" over the issue. —*PTI*

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US won't strike Iran's power plants for 5 days: Trump

Claims talks on over Hormuz; Tehran calls it lies

WASHINGTON DC, 23 MARCH

US President Donald Trump on Monday extended his deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, pausing threatened strikes on Iranian power plants for five days and signalling a possible diplomatic opening in the ongoing conflict.

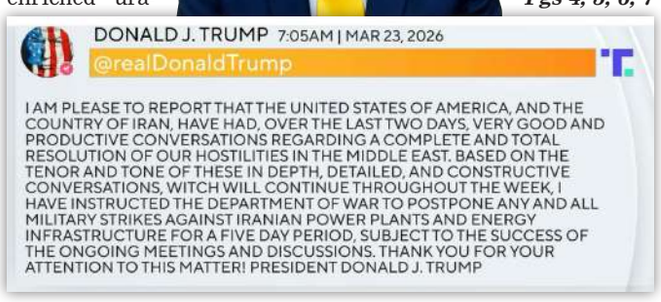
WEST ASIA WAR DAY-24

In a post on Truth Social (in pic), Trump said "very good and productive conversations" were under way and hinted at a "complete and total resolution". He told reporters that Iran wants "to make a deal" and claimed US envoys had engaged with a "respected" Iranian leader, though he did not identify the individual. Trump, however, clarified that the US had not held talks with Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei. Trump said talks led by his Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff and adviser Jared Kushner continued into Sunday night and would proceed further. He added that, if a deal is reached, the US would seek control of Iran's enriched uranium tied to its nuclear programme.

However, Iranian officials strongly denied any negotiations. State media and the semi-official Mehr news agency said there was "no dialogue" with Washington, describing Trump's remarks as an attempt to lower energy prices and buy time for potential military action.

The war, now in its fourth week, has seen major escalations, including strikes on energy infrastructure, attacks across Gulf nations and mounting civilian casualties exceeding 2,000. Trump had earlier warned the US would "obliterate" Iran's power plants if it failed to ease its blockade of the Strait within 48 hours. Iran's Revolutionary Guard has threatened retaliation, warning of strikes on energy, industrial and desalination infrastructure linked to US interests across the region. Officials also cautioned that any attack could lead to the mining of key maritime routes —*PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 4, 5, 6, 7


DONALD J. TRUMP 7:05AM | MAR 23, 2026
@realDonaldTrump
I AM PLEASE TO REPORT THAT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE COUNTRY OF IRAN, HAVE HAD, OVER THE LAST TWO DAYS, VERY GOOD AND PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS REGARDING A COMPLETE AND TOTAL RESOLUTION OF OUR HOSTILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST. BASED ON THE TENOR AND TONE OF THESE IN DEPTH, DETAILED, AND CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS, WITCH WILL CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE WEEK, I HAVE INSTRUCTED THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR TO POSTPONE ANY AND ALL MILITARY STRIKES AGAINST IRANIAN POWER PLANTS AND ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A FIVE DAY PERIOD, SUBJECT TO THE SUCCESS OF THE ONGOING MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS MATTER! PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP

India, Russia reaffirm $100B trade goal

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday reaffirmed India's "steadfast" ties with Russia, calling for the removal of non-tariff barriers and regulatory hurdles to boost bilateral trade to USD 100 billion by 2030.

Speaking at a conference, he said the partnership, rooted in trust and mutual respect, remains vital in an evolving multipolar world.

"The evolving multipolar order requires greater cooperation between India and Russia, including through BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), G20 and the UN," he said amid continued global tensions over discounted Russian oil exports and pressure from the United States on countries, including India, to diversify energy sourcing. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov praised India's independent foreign policy, while both sides highlighted progress in trade, energy and nuclear cooperation. —*PTI*

BUSY DAY AT THE SOUDHA

K'taka passes Bill to replace EVMs with ballot papers

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Legislative Assembly on Monday passed the Karnataka Grama Swaraj and Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2026 after a heated debate over the reintroduction of ballot papers for local body elections, with the opposition BJP staging a walkout and LoP R Ashoka tearing a copy of the Bill before exiting the House.

The Bill seeks to replace Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with ballot papers in Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat elections, with the government arguing that the move is aimed at restoring transparency and public confidence in the electoral process.

"The principle of secrecy of the ballot is the cornerstone of free and fair elections," Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Priyank Kharge said, substantiating the government's rationale for the amendment.

Initiating the discussion, he said, "Under Article 326 of the Constitution, it guarantees us the 'Right to Vote'. Elections must be transparent, free, and fair. The secrecy in voting must be protected at all costs".

Citing concerns over EVMs, he said in recent times, "trust in EVMs has been decreasing". He further said several political parties, experts and NGOs have questioned the ECI, but the poll body has no answers. He added that several states continue to hold Panchayat polls through ballot papers. As the debate turned acrimonious, BJP members staged a walkout, with Ashoka tearing a copy of the Bill in protest before leaving the House. —*PTI*

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Bill to curb honour killings passed, govt calls it social reform

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Karnataka Assembly on Monday passed two key bills, including the Karnataka Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Unity, Freedom, Dignity and Tradition in Marriage (Ivanaarava, Ivanaarava) Bill, 2026, with the government asserting that both measures aim at social reform and preservation of heritage.

Moving the marriage-related Bill, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said the legislation was intended to address social issues such as honour crimes and to reinforce constitutional values in society.

"This is a Bill aimed at bringing social change and, in a way, enabling a social revolution," he said.

He noted that values of equality and inclusivity had long been articulated in Indian philosophical traditions but had not translated into practice.

The minister said, "In matters of marriage, especially where freedom is involved, we have seen many instances of violence in society."

The Minister clarified, "This enactment will not support the concept of living together. Let me make it clear. It is intended to strengthen the institution of marriage."

Also, he stressed that the Bill would provide legal strength to protect couples and promote social harmony.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said, "The intention is good." But he pointed to recurring incidents of honour killings, particularly in parts of the Old Mysuru region, and sought clarity on the need for a new law.

The Minister said the government had deliberated extensively and ensured that the law would complement existing provisions. —*PTI*

Cylinders would be provided once every 25 days in urban areas and once every 40 days in rural regions —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Adjust to 20% commercial LPG supply: K'taka govt

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Minister K H Muniyappa on Monday said the state is supplying about 20 per cent of the usual commercial LPG demand, prioritising essential sectors, while urging stakeholders to "adjust" amid constraints.

Replying during Question Hour in the Karnataka Legislative Council, the minister said allocations have been streamlined following the intervention by the Centre, with a focus on education, public utilities and the hospitality sector.

"Now we are supplying around 16,000 cylinders per day," he said.

Against a daily usage of about 45,000 commercial cylinders earlier, the current supply has been rationalised based on priority. Educational institutions have been allotted 4,200 cylinders and government units including canteens, airports, railways and bus stations 1,200 cylinders, he said.

"For hotels, 20 per cent allocation means about 10,000 cylinders, which will be distributed. Every hotel will get supply," he said. He also said that 500 cylinders per day have been earmarked for agriculture, seed processing and pharmaceutical activities, with 205 cylinders reserved for emergencies.

The Centre has permitted utilisation of 16,105 cylinders and clarified that supply to commercial users would be restricted to 20 per cent of their usual consumption, he said. Muniyappa said cylinders would be provided once every 25 days in urban areas and once every 40 days in rural regions. —*PTI*

GERMANY LOOKS TO HIRE INDIANS AMID LABOUR SHORTAGE

BERLIN, 23 MARCH

Germany is struggling with a shortage of skilled workers. The country is now turning to India to solve this problem, reports the BBC.

For Handirk von Ungern-Sternberg, it started with an email from India in February 2021. The message was, "We have young people looking for vocational training."

Von Ungern-Sternberg was working for the Freiburg Chamber of Skilled Crafts.

The email arrived at an opportune moment.

His first call was to the head of the butchers' guild. From 19,000 businesses in 2002, there were fewer than 11,000 left by 2021. Employers were finding it impossible to recruit young people. "Butchery is hard work," says the butchers' guild head, Joachim Lederer.

Back in India, Magic Billion managed to recruit 13 young people, who arrived in Germany in 2022 to begin their butchery apprenticeship. They would spend part of their time at college. Among them was 21-year-old Anakha Miriam Shaji. Anakha had come to work for Lederer in the town of Weil am Rhein. Von Ungern-Sternberg has set up his own employment agency, India Works, in partnership with Aditi Banerjee, of Magic Billion, to help bring more Indians to Germany.

From those original 13 there are now 200 Indians working in German butchers' shops. —*Agencies*

TEHRAN THANKS INDIA

From cash to gold, Kashmiris send donations to Iran

SRINAGAR, 23 MARCH

Donations for war-ravaged Iran continued to pour in from across Kashmir for the second consecutive day on Monday, with people cutting across sectarian lines contributing money and valuables in a show of solidarity.

Shia leader Imran Ansari urged authorities to allow the effort to continue "with dignity" and without unnecessary questioning. The Embassy of Iran in India also shared images of the drives, thanking Indians for their "kindness" and "humanity", and said "the kindness will never be forgotten".

Donation camps were organised in several localities of Srinagar, including Zadibal, Hassanabad, Shalimar, Qamarwari, Lawaypora and Bemina, with people from the Sunni community also participating. Similar efforts were reported from Budgam, Bandipora and Baramulla districts.

People collect donations to provide aid for war-hit victims of the Iran crisis, in Budgam, Jammu on Monday —*PTI*

Officials said contributions ranged from cash, gold and silver to copper utensils and household items. Women donated jewellery, while some families even offered livestock.

In a poignant gesture, a woman donated gold preserved in memory of her husband who died nearly three decades ago, while children contributed their savings. —*Agencies*

Activists protest against chopping of trees in Mysuru

MYSURU, 23 MARCH

Activists on Monday held a protest condemning the State Forest Department's inaction in the cutting down of 41 trees on the banks of the Kapila river near Hejjige village in Nanjangud taluk in Mysuru. Members of various organisations such as Pariasarakkagi Naavu, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Mysuru Grahakara Parishat and Karnataka Rashtra Samithi Party participated in the protest that took place in front of Aranya Bhavan in Ashokapuram in Mysuru. They submitted a memorandum to the chief conservator of forests demanding a comprehensive investigation into the illegal felling of trees and the immediate arrest of the contractor responsible for it. The protesters urged the Forest Department to monitor the green zones through drone surveillance system—*Salar News*

630 drunken driving cases filed in B'luru

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Bengaluru traffic police has registered 634 cases of drunken driving and collected Rs 1.29 lakh in fines from offenders caught for over-speeding violations during a week-long special drive held from 16-22 March. According to the traffic police, during the drive against drunken driving, a total of 45,568 vehicles were checked and 634 cases were registered against those found driving under the influence of alcohol. In the drive against over-speeding, 122 cases were registered, a senior police officer said. "The special drive was aimed at curbing the menace of drunken driving and over speeding to ensure road safety in the City. We will continue to conduct the drive," he said —*PTI*

K'taka eases professional tax compliance with new bill

It scraps need to file annual returns after paying Rs 2,500 tax

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Monday passed the Karnataka Tax on Professions, Trades, Callings and Employments (Amendment) Bill, 2026, aimed at simplifying compliance and reducing procedural burden on taxpayers.

Explaining the provisions, state Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said in the assembly that the amendment seeks to remove the requirement of filing returns after payment of professional tax, while retaining the existing flat rate structure.

"Once they pay Rs 2,500, there is no need to file returns again. It is a flat rate—Rs 2,500," he said.

The Minister noted that professional tax is constitutionally mandated, with a ceiling of Rs 2,500 annually for individuals earning above Rs 25,000.

"Regardless of their income, the amount to be paid is only Rs 2,500," he said.

He pointed out that despite paying the fixed amount, taxpayers were earlier required to file returns, leading to avoidable compliance burden. "For that, a chartered accountant has to prepare it. Our staff have to verify it. This results in wastage of time and creates an unnecessary compliance burden on people," he said.

Gowda said the amendment aligns legal provisions with technological changes already introduced.

"Once Rs 2,500 is paid, there will be no further need to file returns. We are making provisions for this in the law as well," he said.

Exemptions have been extended not only from tax payment but also from filing returns for certain categories —*PIXABAY*

He further said exemptions have been extended not only from tax payment but also from filing returns for certain categories.

"Senior citizens, those serving in the armed forces, and persons with disabilities. Now we are also removing the requirement of filing returns for them," he said.

Highlighting the objective, the Minister said the move would improve governance and public convenience. "This will lead to ease of governance, ease of compliance, reduce unnecessary burden on people, and cut down unnecessary paperwork," he said.

"With this simplification, it will be beneficial to the public. With this objective, we have brought this amendment," he added.

Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, R Ashoka, welcomed the bill. —*PTI*

K'taka to restrict mobile use among under 16 students

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Legislative Council on Monday was informed that the government is working on a comprehensive framework to regulate mobile phone and social media usage among students below 16 years, amid rising concerns over its impact on children.

Primary and Secondary Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa said the proposal, announced in the Budget, seeks to impose restrictions on mobile usage for children under 16 — a first-of-its-kind initiative in India. He was responding to concerns raised by MLCs Pratap Nayak and Javare Gowda, who flagged alarming levels of mobile addiction among students.

Speaking during Question Hour, the minister acknowledged that while rules prohibiting mobile phones in schools already exist, enforcement has been weak. Students often continue to use devices outside school premises, he noted, highlighting the absence of an effective monitoring system.

Bangarappa said that although mobile phones can aid learning, they are increasingly exposing children to harmful and unnecessary content. "If mobile helps learning, it is fine, but much of what is available today is not useful," he said, stressing that children tend to absorb whatever they are exposed to.

The government is coordinating with the IT Department, which has constituted a committee to examine social media practices and recommend safeguards. Inputs will also be sought from parents, experts and international child welfare organisations before finalising the policy.

Emphasising a balanced approach, he said mobile phones cannot be entirely eliminated in the current AI-driven era.

Bangarappa said the policy would be placed before the House in the next session, with the aim of creating a model that could serve as an example for the rest of the country. —*PTI*

'Don't allow curtailment of Budget session'

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Leader of the Opposition, R Ashoka urged the Speaker on Monday not to allow the Budget session of the legislature to be curtailed, amid indications of such a move, in the context of by-polls in two Assembly constituencies. Ashoka said that there are indications the session may be curtailed and urged Speaker UT Khader not to allow it. As the House met for the day, Ashoka said, "We wanted to discuss Bengaluru's issues, but no one is here. Neither the Chief Minister nor the Deputy Chief Minister are present."

Speaker Khader replied, "Let them come, the matter can be taken up after that."

Ashoka asked whether they would come and that he has "doubts," about that. "There are indications that the government may curtail the session." Meanwhile, speaking to reporters outside the Assembly, Labour Minister Santosh Lad admitted there were indications the session might be curtailed. —*PTI*

Mindful of challenges, maintaining 'fiscal balance': Govt

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Monday witnessed a sharp exchange over the state's finances, with the government asserting it is maintaining "fiscal balance" while the opposition BJP warned of a potential crisis similar to Himachal Pradesh.

Replying during the Budget discussion, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda defended expenditure on subsidy or 'guarantee' schemes, stating the government is mindful of future challenges while safeguarding fiscal health. He highlighted that Karnataka recorded the highest GST growth in the country at 11 per cent, surpassing Maharashtra and Gujarat, and also has the highest per capita income.

BJP MLA Sunil Kumar raised concerns over rising subsidy expenditure, noting that 14 per cent of the state's funds are directed towards such schemes. He cautioned against a growing "subsidy culture" and urged the government to consider long-term implications, especially as over Rs 1 lakh crore has been spent on guarantees.

Senior BJP leader S Suresh Kumar cited developments in Himachal Pradesh, where salaries of ministers and officials have been partially deferred amid financial strain, urging a similar assessment in Karnataka. Defending subsidies, Gowda said they drive demand-side growth, arguing that money given to citizens circulates multiple times in the economy, boosting consumption, production and overall economic activity. —*PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar with Samarth Mallikarjun during the filing of nominations for Devanagere bypolls –*SALAR NEWS*

K'taka bypolls: Cong, BJP file nominations

DAVANGERE, 23 MARCH

The BJP and Congress candidates filed their nominations on Monday for the bypolls to two Assembly constituencies in Karnataka.

While the Opposition BJP seemed united in facing these polls, the ruling Congress faces rebel trouble, with ticket aspirant Sadiq Pailwan filing his nomination from Davangere South.

Bypolls for the Bagalkot and Davanagere South Assembly constituencies will be held on 9 April.

The polls were necessitated following the deaths of senior Congress MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa, respectively.

The BJP has fielded former MLA and 2023 defeated candidate Veerabhadrayya Charantimath as its candidate from Bagalkot. It has fielded a fresh face, Srinivas T Dasakariyappa from Davangere South.

The Congress gave tickets to Umesh Meti son of late legislator HY Meti, and Samarth Mallikarjun, the grandson of Shamanur Shivashankarappa.

Samarth's father, SS Mallikarjun, is a Cabinet Minister and is in charge of Davangere district, while his mother, Prabha Mallikarjun, is a Member of Parliament.

There was a strong demand from Muslims for the Davangere South Congress ticket.

Siddaramaiah asserted that he was one hundred per cent confident that Congress will win by-polls. He also played down the disgruntlement among other ticket aspirants in the Congress, saying that everyone will be convinced and come together to ensure the party's victory. —*PTI*

KSCA INSPECTS STADIUM SAFETY AHEAD OF IPL OPENER

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Karnataka State Cricket Association president Venkatesh Prasad and police personnel inspected security and infrastructure upgrades at M Chinnaswamy Stadium ahead of the Indian Premier League 2026 in Bengaluru on Monday. The review follows a 2025 stampede during Royal Challengers Bengaluru celebrations after the title win in which over 11 people died, prompting 17 safety recommendations by the Justice John D'Cunha Committee. Measures include widened entry gates, new access points and a dedicated fan zone. The checks come after reports suggested that the work on preventive steps were far from done and could not be completed on time for the opener. Attendance for early matches, including RCB's 28 March opener, may be capped at 30,000–35,000 spectator. —*PTI*

-MOHAMMED ASAD

HD Deve Gowda urges PM to save Karnataka

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda criticised the Congress-led government in Karnataka, stating only God can save the state's current situation.

Speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the discussion on the Appropriation Bill (No 2), he urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take steps to revive industry in Karnataka, saying, "Do something for Karnataka. Don't worry about this Karnataka government."

Devegowda, a Janata Dal (Secular) leader, added he was "not a power-hungry politician" and had rejected demands for his party's merger.

He also appealed to members not to attack the Prime Minister over the LPG shortage, stating, "It is only Prime Minister Narendra Modi who can tell the world how the West Asia crisis should end."

He criticised the current state of affairs in Karnataka, saying, "How things are going on in Karnataka, God only will save Karnataka." He also urged the government to assist industrial clusters he had established in seven districts.

Deve Gowda referenced remarks by Rajya Sabha Opposition Leader Mallikarjun Kharge, and said he advised his son, HD Kumaraswamy, to support Modi and the BJP, adding, "Today, I am happy my son is a minister in Modi ji's government." —*PTI*

Outrage over drunk youth triple-riding on City streets

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Bengaluru traffic police on Monday launched a probe after a video surfaced online showing three youngsters triple-riding on a two-wheeler and driving "recklessly" on the City's streets.

The incident, which occurred in BTM Layout here, has sparked outrage on social media, with the video going viral over concerns about public safety.

Police said strict action will be taken against such irresponsible driving and violations of traffic rules.

In the video clip, one of the pillion riders, wearing a helmet, can be seen purportedly drinking from a beer bottle while the trio speeds through a road.

The police have registered a case. —*PTI*

4 killed as bus hits railing on B'luru-Mysuru Expressway

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Four people were killed and three others injured when a private bus crashed into a roadside railing early on Monday, police said.

The accident occurred on the Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway near Puttappanadoddi in Sankalagere village near Channapatna of Bengaluru South district.

The dead are Mohammed Faran, 22, and Sulfi, 45, from Kerala's Kozhikode, Rashid, 45, from Kalasipalya in Bengaluru, and Sakir, 27, from Bengaluru.

Preliminary findings indicated that the driver fell asleep.

Police said the accident occurred at around 4.30 am when the driver of the private bus that was en route from Calicut to Bengaluru allegedly lost control and hit the iron railings on the road's left side. The bus continued scraping the railing for nearly 100 metres before stopping.

The iron railing was installed to separate the main carriageway from the service road. The bus had 36 passengers, a senior police officer said.

Three injured people were admitted to a hospital.

The police have registered a case in the incident. —*PTI*

CASTE DISCRIMINATION

Dalits beaten for sitting in temple, priest held

YADGIR, 23 MARCH

A temple priest has been arrested after two Dalit youths were allegedly assaulted for sitting on a temple platform in Yampad village of Yadgir district, police told Salar News.

The incident occurred on March 21 during a tonsure ceremony at a Hanuman (Anjaneya) temple. Police said Ananthappa, the temple priest, was taken into custody, while other accused remain absconding.

According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Suresh Nayak, Anil Kumar, 32, a Group 'D' employee from Gajarakote, and his brother-in-law Siddalingappa, 30, had attended the function and sat on a platform in front of the temple due to the heat. Both sustained injuries and are being treated at the Community Health Centre in Gurmitkal.

Speaking to Salar News, Anil Kumar alleged that the priest objected to them sitting there, stating that Scheduled Caste persons were not allowed on the platform and should sit separately. When he refused, the priest allegedly instigated others, leading to a violent assault. The victims were beaten with sticks and iron rods, abused with caste slurs, and threatened. Anil Kumar's mother, who intervened, was also assaulted.

Police said the priest has claimed Anil Kumar had earlier entered the temple premises for theft. A case has been registered under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, and a probe is underway. —*Salar News*

In a 1st, State govt facility to provide oxygen therapy for diabetic wounds

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Karnataka Institute of Endocrinology and Research (KIER) in Bengaluru has introduced Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) to treat diabetic foot complications, particularly chronic, non-healing wounds, marking a first for a government facility in the state.

HBOT is a specialised treatment in which patients breathe pure oxygen in a pressurised chamber, allowing the blood to carry higher levels of oxygen to damaged tissues. This accelerates healing, fights infection and promotes the growth of new blood vessels—critical for patients with poor circulation.

The institute, which exclusively treats diabetic patients, handles around 120 diabetic foot cases daily and houses one of the earliest dedicated podiatry departments. It has set up two HBOT units, procured at a cost of approximately 1 crore through CSR funding. Each session lasts about 70 minutes, during which patients breathe oxygen at nearly twice the normal atmospheric pressure. To ease anxiety, one attendant is permitted inside during treatment.

HBOT is designed to reduce infections, speed up wound healing and lower the risk of amputations. KIER plans to offer the therapy at less than half the cost charged by private hospitals, where sessions typically begin at Rs 3,000.

India accounts for one in seven adults living with diabetes globally, with diabetic foot ulcers affecting up to 34 per cent of patients.

In Karnataka, prevalence of diabetes ranges between 12–16 per cent, with up to 13,500 new cases annually, contributing to nearly 80 per cent of non-traumatic lower limb amputations. —*Salar News*

—PTI

T'gana BJP Prez, cadre detained for storming Assembly

HYDERABAD, 23 MARCH

Telangana BJP President **N Ramchander Rao** and several party members were detained on Monday for attempting to storm the Assembly to protest the Congress government's alleged failure to fulfil poll promises. "I was arrested for standing up against the betrayal, deception, and cheating that the Congress government has inflicted on the people of Telangana by its false promises," Rao said in a post on 'X'. The Telangana BJP launched the "Assembly Siege" protest to reflect the growing anger and frustration of the people of Telangana, who feel cheated by the Congress government that promised much but delivered nothing, the party added. Congress has exposed its anti-democratic mindset by crushing dissent, Rao added. —*PTI*

M'rashtra ZP poll: NCP, Sena demand SP's suspension

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Deputy Chairperson Neelam Gorhe has ordered the suspension of Satara Superintendent of Police Tushar Doshi over the manhandling that occurred during the Zilla Parishad president election in Maharashtra on Friday. Shiv Sena head Eknath Shinde on Monday termed the alleged police action against some elected Satara Zilla Parishad members last week as a "murder of democracy", accusing authorities of misusing power to influence the local body poll outcome. Shiv Sena's Shamburaj Desai and NCP's Makarand Patil alleged that the local police manhandled them during the polls. Responding to the issue in the state assembly, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis ordered an inquiry and said action will follow its findings. —*PTI*

Revamping Kejri's bungalow cost 342% higher: CAG

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) revealed that the renovation of former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence at 6 Flagstaff Road cost Rs 33.66 crore, 342 per cent above the initial estimate, in a report tabled in the Delhi Assembly. Of this, Rs 18.88 crore was spent on "superior specifications, artistic, antique and ornamental" items. The BJP dubbed it "Sheesh Mahal" to highlight alleged corruption during the AAP's tenure, which ended with their removal in February 2025. The report mentioned delayed approval, diversion of funds, incomplete construction, and alteration of the Camp Office from permanent to semi-permanent. —*PTI*

UK Air Chief hails IAF's new move to train RAF pilots

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Britain's Air Chief Marshal Sir Harv Smyth on Monday hailed a new move that will facilitate the Indian Air Force train pilots of the UK's Royal Air Force as the two sides are looking at boosting overall defence ties in the face of emerging security challenges. The Chief of the Air Staff, presently on a three-day visit to India, held wide-ranging talks with his Indian counterpart Air Chief Marshal AP Singh and it is understood that the West Asia crisis figured in the discussion. Smyth met Singh to discuss evolving security threats and ways to further strengthen the partnership between the two air forces, according to a British readout. Britain's Air Chief Marshal Sir Harv Smyth is in India to boost military ties in the face of "emerging security challenges", it said without elaborating. —*PTI*

Union Minister Piyush Goyal along with AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, PMK MP Anbumani Ramadoss and others during a press conference ahead of the TN Assembly elections, in Chennai, on Monday —*PTI*

AIADMK allots 56 seats to its 3 allies

EPS says talks still ongoing with other allies

CHENNAI, 23 MARCH

The AIADMK-led NDA in Tamil Nadu on Monday finalised seat sharing arrangement for key constituents of the alliance for the 23 April Assembly polls, with the Dravidian party allotting 27 seats for BJP, 18 for PMK and 11 for AMMK.

AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, addressing a crowded press conference at party headquarters Puratchi Thalaivar MGR Maaligai, here, said talks continued with other allies as well and it will be concluded by tonight.

The names of constituencies to be contested by alliance parties will be identified soon, he said, adding the seat sharing talks were cordial.

Elections to 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu will be held on 23 April. NDA's other constituents include former union minister GK Vasan-led Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar) and IJK.

- Edappadi K Palaniswami, expressed confidence that the alliance would go on to win at least 210 Assembly constituencies out of the total 234.

Asked about the number of seats to be contested by AIADMK, Palaniswami said talks continued with some parties and following its conclusion the information would be shared.

Palaniswami described the alliance it leads as one marked by "bonding," and called it a "victorious" combine. He expressed confidence that the alliance would go on to win at least 210 Assembly constituencies out of the total 234.

"The alliance will win and AIADMK will form the government," he asserted.

Ridiculing "protracted, delayed" seat-sharing exercise involving "war of words" between the DMK and Congress, he alleged the CPI(M), which got six seats in 2021 was now struggling to get five Assembly seats.

Hitting back at DMK's criticism aimed at him for his Delhi visit to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah in connection with seat sharing, he wondered why DMK MP Kanimozhi met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the national capital recently. It has become a wont for Chief Minister MK Stalin to spread defamatory content targeting the NDA leaders if they visited Delhi, he alleged. —*PTI*

Total loan waiver for farmers unlikely: FM

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

There is no proposal of a complete loan waiver for farmers under consideration with the central government, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman informed Parliament on Monday.

However, she said, the government has taken several measures to strengthen the economic conditions of the farmers, including timely and adequate credit through Kisan Credit Card (KCC), wherein crop loan up to Rs 3 lakh is provided at subsidised interest rates under the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS), with additional incentives for timely repayment.

Besides, the government has enhanced collateral free short-term agricultural loans, including loans for allied activities, from Rs 1.60 lakh to Rs 2.00 lakh and ensuring adequate flow of credit from the banking system to the priority sectors of the economy, including agriculture, under Priority Sector Lending guidelines issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), she said in a reply to the Lok Sabha.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman—*PTI*

She said, additionally, the government has launched crop insurance and direct cash transfer to landholding farmers through Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), etc.

Replying to another question, Sitharman said the exemption in respect of disability pension received by members of the armed forces, who are invalided out of service on account of a disability attributable to, or aggravated by military service, has existed since the framework under the Income-Tax Act, 1922, as provided vide Notification No. 878-F (Income Tax) dated 21 March, 1922.

When the Income-tax Act, 1961, came into force, she said, the exemption continued through the repeal and savings provisions. She said there is no discontinuation of the said tax exemption. —*PTI*

Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill sent to JPC

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The Lok Sabha on Monday referred the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for detailed scrutiny. The motion, suggested by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, was adopted by a voice vote.

The Bill aims to amend the Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act, 2008, and the Companies Act to facilitate ease of business.

The proposed amendments are expected to streamline regulatory processes.

Notably, it shifts several minor procedural lapses from criminal liability to monetary fines.

Although the Union Cabinet had already cleared the proposed Bill, its introduction in the Lok Sabha met with strong opposition.

Several members alleged the legislation seeks to dilute existing laws mandating that firms allocate 2 per cent of their profits to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

She dismissed claims of CSR dilution, stating the Bill was introduced after two years of deliberations. —*PTI*

"Why is the self-styled Vishwaguru not advancing the (BRICS+) Summit to put together a diplomatic initiative to deal with the crisis in West Asia and its impacts? Clearly, he does not want to antagonise President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

- Jairam Ramesh, Congress General Secretary in charge of Communications

NEP promotes multilingualism: MoS to Lok Sabha

Union Minister of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary said during Question Hour in Lok Sabha on Monday that the National Education Policy (NEP) does not impose any one language, including Hindi, on any state. Rather, it "explicitly promotes multilingualism", citing clear benefits from exposure to multiple languages. Chaudhary noted that despite Tamil Nadu's objections to NEP 2020, the Centre released Rs 538 crore to the state under its flagship Samagra Shiksha education program. —*PTI*

Vijayan flays claim of 'CPI(M)-BJP deal'

THIRUVALLA/T'PURAM, 23 MARCH

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday alleged that a tacit understanding between the Congress and the BJP had paved the way for the saffron party's victory in Nemom during the 2016 Assembly elections, as he rejected opposition claims of a "CPI(M)-BJP deal" for the coming assembly elections.

Addressing a press conference here, Vijayan rejected Congress charge that CPI(M) and the BJP had reached a tacit understanding in around 10 seats, including Palakkad for coming polls.

The CM said Congress had a history of entering into secret ties with the BJP and pointed to Nemom in 2016 as a key example. "The Left parties, especially the CPI(M) has always adopted an uncompromising stand against the RSS and the BJP," Vijayan claimed.

BJP DEFENDS 'HINDU MLA' REMARK

BJP Kerala President Rajeev Chandrasekhar has defended the party's Guruvayur candidate Gopalakrishnan's alleged "Hindu MLA" remarks saying he had not spoken against anyone and only stressed on the need to have a 'believer MLA' in the constituency.

The controversy started after a campaign video by Gopalakrishnan showed him claiming that Guruvayur had not elected a "Hindu MLA" for nearly five decades and is allegedly controlled by 'temple thieves' opposed to temples. —*PTI*

Joker row: Isaac apologises to Pisharody

CPI(M) leader TM Thomas Isaac apologised for calling Congress candidate Ramesh Pisharody a "joker" in the Palakkad Assembly race. Isaac clarified his comment was made in a political context and did not mean to criticise his acting talent.

Pisharody responded that he would not reply in the same tone, emphasising he has "culture". He said, "Culture is not something you get through protests," and highlighted his 26 years in art. Pisharody also dismissed BJP's allegations of lack of development in Kerala. —*PTI*

'WEAKEN SECULAR PARTIES'

Owaisi-Humayun poll tie-up may split votes in WB: Oppn

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Opposition leaders on Monday criticised the alliance between the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and suspended Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLA Humayun Kabir, saying the move could divide votes and weaken 'secular parties' ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections.

AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi has tied up with Humayun Kabir's Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP) for the high-stakes West Bengal Assembly polls. Polling for the 294-member Assembly is scheduled on 23 April and 29 April, with counting of votes on 4 May.

TMC MP Saugata Roy called it a "bad development" and said it may "isolate Muslim masses".

"Owaisi's outfit is actually helping the BJP. But it will not have any impact. They do not have strength and will not get votes," Roy told reporters in the Parliament House complex.

Congress MP Manickam Tagore alleged that "some people have taken a contract to weaken the secular forces".

Another Congress MP Ujjwal Raman Singh said forming alliances is a political choice but stressed that the focus should remain on defeating communal forces.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi alleged that AIMIM often ends up helping the BJP.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MP Mahua Maji labelled the AIMIM as the BJP's "B-team", alleging that it participates in elections only to benefit the saffron party by dividing the opposition's vote share. —*PTI*

EC questions PIL challenging transfer of WB officers

KOLKATA, 23 MARCH

The Election Commission (EC) on Monday questioned the locus standi of the petitioner in filing a PIL challenging the transfer of several officers of the West Bengal government after the announcement of Assembly elections in the state.

The petitioner, a lawyer, claimed in the PIL that 79 officers — 63 police personnel and 16 civil servants — have been shifted by the EC since the announcement of the assembly polls on 15 March.

The petitioner claimed before a division bench presided by Chief Justice Sujoy Paul that the transfers have created a vacuum in governance in the state.

Senior counsel Kalyan Banerjee, representing the petitioner, claimed that the EC is acting in an arbitrary manner and bringing in officers of its choice before conducting the elections in the state.

The state government, represented by Advocate General Kishore Dutta, supported the arguments of the petitioner before the division bench, also comprising Justice Partha Sarathi Sen. —*PTI*

1,202 CANDIDATES FILE NOMINATIONS FOR KERALA POLLS

T'PURAM, 23 MARCH

As many as 1,202 candidates filed nominations across Kerala for the Assembly elections, according to data shared by the Election Commission (EC) on Monday.

Monday was the last day to file nominations for the upcoming Assembly elections in Kerala.

Polling in the 140 constituencies in Kerala will be held on 9 April.

The data showed that 2,039 nominations were filed by 1,202 candidates.

Scrutiny of nominations will be taken up on Tuesday.

The EC also received a total of 43,221 complaints through its CVIGIL application, of which 43,037 have been disposed of, officials said.

On Monday alone, 8,084 complaints were received, and 7,910 were disposed of, an EC bulletin said.

As part of election enforcement activities, officials said goods worth Rs 2,968.16 lakh were seized, including Rs 350.38 lakh seized on Monday.

A total number of 1,18,202 violations were reported, with action taken in 1,80,472 instances.

Additionally, 41,388 posters and hoardings from public and private properties were removed, with the highest number reported in Thrissur, followed by Palakkad and Malappuram. —*PTI*

11% DROP IN VISAS

India, China hit by Trump's harsh visa policies: Report

WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

India and China bore the maximum brunt of tougher immigration policy unveiled by the Trump administration which issued 2.5 lakh fewer visas in the first eight months of 2025 compared with the same period in 2024, according to a media report.

From January to August 2025, the State Department approved 11 per cent fewer permanent resident and temporary visas compared with the same period a year before, according to State Department data released in early March.

These visas are generally issued for students, workers, and family members of citizens and legal residents.

The 11 per cent drop doesn't include tourist visas, it said.

The report said that visas for Chinese and Indian nationals fell by about 84,000 compared with the same period in 2024.

Business and tourism visas declined by about 3.4 per cent in the first eight months of 2025 compared with that period a year earlier, a drop of nearly two lakh visas.

Between January and August 2024, the US had issued more than 3.44 lakh student visas, the number declined to a little over 2.38 lakh during the same period in 2025.

The family preference visa fell by more than 27 per cent or by over 44,000.

The visas issued to sea and airline workers also reduced by 30,876, while those issued for culture exchange visitors declined by 29,594.

The visas issued to fiance/spouse declined to 18,894 for the period under review in 2025. —*PTI*

Gogoi makes debut in Assam polls

JORHAT/RANCHI, 23 MARCH

Assam Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi on Monday filed his nomination papers from Jorhat assembly seat, making his electoral debut in the state polls.

Gogoi, who is also the deputy leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, visited religious places of all communities before starting his rally from Jorhat stadium.

The procession, which saw participation from a large number of people, concluded at the district commissioner's office after around three hours.

Congress is part of the six-party Opposition alliance comprising the Raijor Dal, Assam Jatiyatabadi Party (AJP), CPI(M), CPI(ML) and the All-Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC).

Gogoi told reporters before filing his nomination that the upcoming assembly election was an "opportunity to cleanse Assam politics".

Congress candidate for the Jorhat Assembly constituency Gaurav Gogoi file his nomination for Assembly election in Assam on Monday —*ANI*

The last date for filing of nomination papers is on Monday, while the documents would be scrutinised on 24 March, and the last date for withdrawal is 26 March.

Additionally, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) on Monday announced its list of 21 candidates for the elections to the 126-member Assam assembly.

JMM wants to shed its image as a regional party and emerge as a national political outfit. It aims to woo about 70 lakh tea tribe community. —*PTI*

Delhi logs lowest annual PM 2.5, PM 10 levels after 2015

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Delhi recorded the lowest yearly average of particulate matter PM2.5 and PM10 in 2025, barring the Covid year of 2020, according to the economic survey of 2025-26 tabled in the Delhi Assembly by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday. The report, which quotes Delhi Pollution Control Committee's (DPCC) Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring System (CAAQMS) data, the yearly average of PM10 in 2025 was 209 (measured in micrograms per cubic metre) and that of PM2.5 was 100. This was the lowest since 2015, before which data is not available. In 2020, the year of the global Covid pandemic, the PM10 yearly average had dropped to 187 but PM2.5 remained at 101, one unit higher than the reading registered in the year 2025. —*PTI*

Woman dies during surgery, five docs booked

BALLIA, 23 MARCH

A 24-year-old woman died allegedly during a surgical procedure at a private hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia, prompting protests by her family, police said Monday. The incident occurred Sunday in Kotwali area. Anisha Rai of Devkali village was undergoing kidney stone surgery when she allegedly died due to excessive bleeding. Relatives staged a sit-in protest, demanding the hospital be sealed and an FIR lodged. Senior officials, including Additional District Magistrate Anil Kumar, pacified protesters and assured legal action. Based on a complaint by husband Shivanshu Rai, five doctors—Jyotsna Singh, Apoorva Singh, Deepak Singh, Sanjay Singh, and Rohan Gupta—were booked under Section 103(1) of the BNS for murder. —*PTI*

'RG Kar patient forced to walk to toilet, dies'

KOLKATA, 23 MARCH

The family of a patient at state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital here alleged that he died on Monday due to lack of a trolley as he was forced to walk despite his critical condition. Biswajit Samanta, a resident of Nimta, was brought to the trauma care unit of the hospital in the early hours of Monday after he complained of breathing difficulties and nose bleeding, according to his family. Relatives said doctors provided initial treatment and asked them to wait for admission procedures. However, Samanta wanted to go to the toilet. According to his family, they were advised to take him to a pay-and-use toilet located outside the trauma care facility. His son alleged that despite repeated requests, no wheelchair was provided, and the patient was forced to walk. He claimed that Samanta was taken to the first floor of the pay-and-use toilet complex, and he suddenly collapsed before reaching the toilet. —*PTI*

Haryana rights panel seeks report on Gurugram crash

CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

The Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC) has issued notices to officials seeking reports on the death of seven workers in a construction site collapse in Gurugram. The incident occurred 9 March at an under-construction sewage treatment plant at Sidhrawali village near Delhi's Jaipur Expressway. Six workers were from Jharkhand, one from Rajasthan, and four others were injured. The HHRC directed officials to provide details on casualties, rescue operations, safety compliance, action against those responsible, compensation, and enforcement of labour laws before the next hearing on 13 May. The commission emphasised construction work is hazardous and said unsafe conditions represent serious rights violations. "These incidents cannot be viewed as workplace accidents," it said. —*PTI*

SC Judge flags excessive use of UAPA

Criminalisation of dissent not compatible with democracy, says Justice Bhuyan

NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The goal of achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047 cannot be achieved through criminalisation of dissent, mindless arrests under the anti-terror law UAPA and "deep social fault lines," Supreme Court Judge Justice Ujjal Bhuyan said.

Speaking at the first national conference of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) in Bengaluru on Sunday, he also regretted the poor representation of women in the higher judiciary. He contrasted it with the figure of more than 50 per cent women becoming judicial officers in district courts.

He said that as per the collegium's subjective assessment criteria, only a minuscule get selected as judges of HCs and the SC.

Raising serious concerns over the application of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), he referred to the data from 2019 to 2023 and said a truly developed nation must prioritise constitutional values over political slogans.

Presenting data from 2019 till 2023 of the people arrested under the UAPA, he said thousands were arrested, but the conviction rate is around five per cent.

Justice Ujjal Bhuyan —*PTI*

On the low representation of women in higher judiciary, he said they made up only 14 per cent of high court judges.

Former CJI BR Gavai said there were many verdicts that said that if the name of a person recommended for judgeship in a high court was returned for reconsideration by the government and reiterated by the collegium, the government had to appoint them. "But even after repeated reiterations by the collegium, many have not been appointed," he said. — *PTI*

PIL on national emblem binned

The SC rejected a PIL seeking installation of the national emblem on the SC building's dome, saying that the matter falls within its jurisdiction. CJI Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said on Monday that they will examine the issue as an administrative issue and asked the SC secretary general to "put a note before the CJI." The bench was hearing the PIL filed by Badaravada Venugopal, popularly known as 'Bada Khatarnak'. —*PTI*

SC calls Gurugram cops in minor's rape case

Questioning the "insensitive" approach of the Gurugram police and the magistrate who examined a four-year-old rape victim, the Supreme Court on Monday directed the Gurugram police commissioner and the probe officer to appear before it on 25 March with case records. The court also directed that the affidavit of the survivor's father should be send in a cover to the district judge of Gurugram after noting the "illegal" approach adopted by the judicial magistrate while examining the minor, that too in the presence of the accused. CJI Kant and Justices Bagchi and Pancholi asked the district judge to take the judicial magistrate's version and apprise it on Wednesday. —*PTI*

KOLKATA METRO: SC PULLS UP WB GOVT FOR CREATING 'ROADBLOCKS'

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday pulled up the West Bengal government for "creating roadblocks" in the construction of a corridor of the Kolkata Metro and asked it not to politicise a development project.

Justices Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, dismissed a plea of the WB government and asked the Calcutta High Court to monitor the project.

"We are only pointing out that the high court has been very magnanimous to the state government. This is a fit case for subjecting the chief secretary, the DGP and other officials to some action," the SC bench said. When the WB counsel argued that the state was under the model code of conduct, the bench pointed out that the HC order was dated 23 December 2025.

Justice Bagchi said the ECI cannot object to this development project. — *PTI*

2 Indian LPG tankers sail through Hormuz Strait

A cargo ship passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea —*PTI*

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Two more Indian-flagged LPG tankers, carrying roughly a day's supply of the country's cooking gas, have crossed the Hormuz Strait and are expected to reach India in the next two days.

LPG tankers 'Pine Gas' and 'Jag Vasant,' started from the Persian Gulf on Monday morning, ship tracking data showed.

The two ships are carrying about 92,000 tonnes of LPG, said Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, said.

He said the ship typically takes two to two-and-a-half days to come from the Gulf to India.

Both the tankers passed between Iran's Larak and Qeshm islands, possibly to make their identity clear to Iranian authorities.

The two ships were among the 22 Indian flagged vessels that were stranded in the Persian Gulf after the war in the Middle East nearly closed the Strait of Hormuz.

Earlier, 'MT Shivalik' and 'MT Nanda Devi,' carrying about 92,712 tonnes of LPG, had safely reached India.

There were 28 Indian vessels in the Strait of Hormuz when the war broke out. Of these, 24 were on the west side of the Strait and four on the east. In the last few days, two vessels from each side have managed to sail to safety.

LPG carrier 'Shivalik' reached Mundra in Gujarat on 16 March, while another LPG tanker, 'Nanda Devi,' reached Kandla in Gujarat the next day.

Two LPG carriers had started their journey on 13 March and crossed the Strait of Hormuz early on 14 March.

Indian-flagged oil tanker 'Jag Laadki,' with 80,886 tonnes of crude from the UAE, reached Mundra on 18 March. Another tanker, 'Jag Prakash,' carrying gasoline from Oman to Africa, had safely crossed the strait and is en route to Tanzania.

Of the 24 remaining Indian vessels in the war zone, 22 are on the West side of the Hormuz Strait with 611 seafarers aboard, while two are on the East side. — *PTI*

Wayanad sailor's parents seek help to contact son

The parents of a 20-year-old seafarer from Mananthavady here are running from pillar to post after losing contact with their son for over a month following the conflict in Iran. Another youth, Jerin Joseph from Idukki, who is also on the ship, has also not been reachable, they said. Fadusha Farhan TU, the son of Shamsudheen and Rehnath, had been working on the commercial vessel, Arucus, flying a Malta flag, operated by Trim Ship Management, and was stationed in Iran. —*PTI*

Police use water cannons to disperse protesters as they tried to 'gherao' Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's residence on Monday demanding the arrest of former minister Laljit Singh Bhullar —*PTI*

Former Punjab minister Bhullar arrested in suicide abetment case

CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

Former Punjab minister and AAP MLA Laljit Singh Bhullar, accused of forcing a state warehousing corporation official to commit suicide, was arrested on Monday.

Gagandeep Singh Randhawa, the district manager of Punjab State Warehousing Corporation in Amritsar, allegedly ended his life by consuming poison on early Saturday. A video appeared in which he purportedly claimed harassment by Bhullar, who resigned as minister later in the day as per the direction of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

Laljit Singh Bhullar—*PTI*

On Saturday night the police booked Bhullar, his father Sukhdev Singh Bhullar and personal assistant Dilbag Singh under Sections 108 (abetment of suicide), 351 (3) (criminal intimidation) and 3 (5) (common intention) of the BNS.

Earlier in the day, the family of Randhawa issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the Punjab government to arrest him.

The family of Randhawa has already said that they would not allow an autopsy and cremation until Bhullar is arrested. "It is my ultimatum. If nothing is done within 24 hours, then I, along with my children (two daughters and a son), will come on the roads," sRandhawa's wife Upinder Kaur, a science teacher, had said. — *PTI*

Mob tries to storm Kuki Zo Council chairman's residence

IMPHAL/ CHURACHANDPUR, 23 MARCH

A mob tried to barge into the residence of Kuki Zo Council chairman H Thanglet in Manipur's Churachandpur town, following which armed men opened blank fire to disperse them, officials said.

The incident took place on Sunday night after youths protested the reported presence of militants in the chairman's house in the district headquarters. They stoned his residence in the afternoon and even tried to barge into it but security forces prevented them by firing tear gas shells, the officials said.

However, on Sunday, the youths again attempted to barge into the chairman's residence, following which armed men opened blank fire to block them. Some protesters also burnt tyres in the Tuibong area but security forces dispersed them by firing tear gas shells. — PTI

Never asked SRK bribe: Wankhede

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Former NCB Mumbai zonal director Sameer Wankhede told the Bombay High Court on Monday that he never demanded or took a bribe from actor Shah Rukh Khan to spare his son Aryan Khan after the latter's arrest in a drug case. Wankhede's counsel, Aabad Ponda, was arguing the IRS officer's plea seeking to quash the FIR registered against him in May 2023 by the CBI for corruption.

Ponda told Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and

Justice Suman Shyam that Wankhede never demanded or took a bribe from Shah Rukh Khan.

As per the CBI FIR, Wankhede and the other accused in the case allegedly demanded Rs 25 crore from the actor to give a clean chit to his son in the drugs case.

However, Ponda told the court on Monday that the CBI has no evidence to establish that Wankhede demanded or received any bribe.

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) had received a tip-off about drugs on the cruise ship 'Cordelia.' A search was conducted and some persons, including Aryan Khan, were arrested, the counsel added.

The high court said it would continue hearing the plea on Tuesday. — *PTI*

Links to Badshah's song removed

CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

The Haryana Police said on Monday that 857 links to rapper-musician Badshah's controversial song 'Tateeree' have been removed from social media platforms.

DGP Ajay Singhal said that any content undermining the dignity of women and minors will not be tolerated.

A FIR had been registered in Panchkula on 6 March, alleging the use of objectionable lyrics and visuals by Badshah in his recent music video, 'Tateeree.' — *PTI*

NO EVIDENCE, SAYS HIS LAWYER

Fire-hit Goa nightclub owner gets bail from Mapusa district court

PANAJI, 23 MARCH

A court in Goa granted bail to Ajay Gupta on Monday, one of the owners of the 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub, where a fire killed 25 people in December 2025, his lawyer said.

The district court of Mapusa in North Goa granted bail to Gupta, who was arrested from New Delhi three months ago.

Advocate Rohan Desai, representing the accused, told the court during arguments that there was no evidence against Gupta in the charge sheet filed by the police in the case.

The charge sheet does not specify any role Gupta had in the tragedy, said Desai, adding allegations of forging documents levelled against his client were also unfounded.

Ajay Gupta, one of the owners of the 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub, being brought to the Delhi Crime Branch office on 10 December 2025—*PTI*

The Judge released Gupta on a surety of Rs 50,000 and imposed several conditions, including that he shall not leave the country. — *PTI*

Ayush Ministry introduces five minute yoga for flyers

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

At 35,000 feet above the ground, time seems to slow down, and so does the body. Hours spent in a confined seat can leave even the most seasoned traveller feeling stiff, fatigued and mentally drained.

Addressing this travel challenge, a simple yet powerful solution is taking flight: Yoga for Air Travel – a 5-minute in-flight wellness protocol.

Developed by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, the protocol is tailored for today's frequent flyers, offering a quick, way to stay refreshed mid-air.

Air travel can lead to stiffness, poor circulation, fatigue, and serious issues like deep vein thrombosis (DVT), officials said.

The 5-minute yoga protocol addresses these challenges through gentle movements,

breathing, and meditation, helping restore balance in both body and mind.

One can begin gentle joint movements for 45 seconds – shoulder rotations, ankle stretches, and simple movements to improve circulation and reduce stiffness.

One can do asanas like Tadasana, seated Cat-Cow, spinal twists, and gentle leg movements. Deep breathing, Anulom Vilom, Bhramari, and Sheetali can calm the nervous system and enhance oxygen flow. — *PTI*

Indore fire victims died due to burns

INDORE, 23 MARCH

Autopsy reports have confirmed that all eight victims of a massive fire at a three-storey house in Indore last week died of burns and suffocation, police said on Monday.

After the incident on 18 March, relatives alleged negligence in the rescue operation and said that an electric current had spread through the house. The police dismissed this claim, citing postmortem reports. Police said the fire broke out around 4am on 18 March at Pugalia's house in Brajeshwari Colony. — *PTI*

Since 2006, the nuclear club has consisted of just nine countries: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel, with its undeclared programmeme —*PTI*

Why US' allies are weighing joining the 'nuclear club'

Canadians are openly discussing the merits and risks of pursuing a nuclear weapon. Europeans are similarly considering a nuclear deterrent for the bloc. In South Korea, public support for a nuclear weapon is at its highest level on record, and even in Japan some politicians are talking about the once-taboo subject.

Until just a few years ago, few experts would have predicted that these nations – all allies of Washington – might one day join the nuclear club. Since 2006, that club has consisted of just nine countries: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel, with its undeclared programme.

The hope of non-proliferation advocates was that nine would be the maximum. But over the past few years, more and more nations are seriously exploring "going nuclear."

As an expert on weapons technology and former assistant director of the CIA for weapons and counterproliferation, I have watched these developments with alarm.

Perceived national security threats still shape US allies' views of developing nuclear weapons – with North Korea a key driver for South Korea, China paramount for Japan, and Iran key for Saudi Arabia.

But what has changed demonstrably for many US. allies is a newfound scepticism over the credibility of the so-called US nuclear umbrella, which for decades has offered allies an easy way of declining to pursue nuclear weapons. Concerned about the Trump administration's foreign policy, some nations are considering developing domestic nuclear weapons programmes or seeking new deterrence assurances.

NUCLEAR ASPIRANTS ACROSS ATLANTIC

The US deployed the first atomic bombs in Japan in 1945, with the Soviet Union conducting its own successful nuclear test four years later. The UK was next to get the bomb in 1952, followed by France in 1960 and China in 1964. Experts believe that Israel first tested a bomb in the late 1960s, while the last entrants into the nuclear club were India in 1972, Pakistan in 1998 and North Korea in 2006.

Experts have long wondered which country might be next. Often, speculation has included US allies such as Egypt, Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Turkey.

For years, such nations were assumed to be under the US nuclear umbrella, a tacit understanding that Washington will defend its nonnuclear allies, including by using US nuclear weapons. Doubts about the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella have existed for years and precede the Trump administration. However, current US officials' criticisms of NATO, focus on burden sharing, and policy positions on Ukraine have brought into stark relief for allies the need to consider other nuclear options. And with allies now focused on the limits of US security guarantees, the list of possible nuclear aspirants has suddenly grown.

European leaders have crafted their public comments on the issue carefully, focusing on concerns about US reliability in general versus the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella.

In Europe, most public discussion has focused on the concept of a common nuclear deterrent for the bloc under the protection of French nuclear forces.

In a major speech in March, French President Emmanuel Macron called for "forward deterrence" involving the temporary deployment of French nuclear-armed aircraft to nine other European countries, including Germany and Poland.

Meanwhile, the Swedish prime minister has had talks with Britain and France about deploying the two countries' nuclear forces to Sweden during wartime.

But the French pledge does not extend a guarantee to defend allies with French nuclear weapons. Instead, France will use nuclear deterrence to defend French "vital interests," a purposefully vague phrase.

There has been growing speculation over whether Poland and Germany might be considering developing their own nuclear weapons. While German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has explicitly ruled it out, Polish leaders' comments leave the option open.

In early March, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk told the Polish parliament that Poland "must reach for the most modern solutions related to nuclear weapons," seeming to reflect personal support for Warsaw's long-term pursuit of a weapon and near-term conversations with the French about a nuclear umbrella.

In Canada, meanwhile, the former chief of the country's defence staff said in February that Canada should not rule out acquiring nuclear weapons.

HEIGHTENED TALKS

Similar discussions among current and former government officials have been percolating across Asia.

For Japan, such talks mark a significant development. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, largely drafted by US occupation authorities after World War II, renounces war. And in 1967 Japan further pledged not to produce, possess or host nuclear weapons in its territory — the "Three Non-Nuclear Principles."

But the issue is no longer taboo. In late 2025, an unnamed official in the new administration of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi expressed his personal opinion that Japan should begin discussions about developing nuclear weapons.

These remarks drew an official rebuke from Takaichi.

South Korea is a different story.

Last year, the foreign minister in the former conservative Yoon administration argued that an independent nuclear deterrent for Seoul "was not off the table," given the unpredictability of the Trump administration.

South Korea's previous nuclear weapons programme and public support for reviving it could make a future South Korean nuclear weapon a real possibility, even though the current center-left administration stresses Seoul's nonnuclear stance.

SAUDI'S FOCUS ON FUEL

In the Middle East, the Washington ally most likely to pursue a nuclear weapon remains Saudi Arabia. In September 2023, de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reiterated his public stance that Riyadh would acquire a nuclear weapon if Iran did.

Perhaps more likely is Ryadh's pursuit of a "latent" nuclear weapons capability, meaning that Saudi Arabia would develop relevant technology and expertise to be able to produce a weapon quickly if it made the political decision to do so. An indigenous capability to enrich uranium would be key.

Indeed, the crown prince has demonstrated an enduring interest in developing a Saudi nuclear fuel cycle.

He continues to pursue domestic uranium enrichment, regardless of the state of Iran's nuclear programme.

In November 2025, members of the US Congress wrote a letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio expressing concern that "the administration has revived talks with Saudi Arabia to give it access to US technology and to potentially allow it to enrich uranium."

In September 2025, the Pakistani defense minister announced that Pakistan would extend its nuclear umbrella to Saudi Arabia, if needed, perhaps reducing Riyadh's focus on obtaining formal US security assurances.

All of these developments suggest that despite decades of nonproliferation experts warning about the expansion of the nuclear club, new entrants are a very real possibility for the first time in decades. —*The Conversation*

SALAR سالار

Rotis to grooming: WB poll trail turns into circus

On the campaign trail in West Bengal these days, the distance between a candidate and a voter can be measured not merely in speeches or slogans but sometimes in rotis rolled, beards shaved and hymns sung.

From kitchens in Hooghly to roadside barber stalls in Birbhum and kirtan gatherings in Jhargram, aspirants cutting across party lines are stepping off the conventional rally stage and walking straight into the everyday lives of people.

In Hooghly's Pursurah, TMC nominee Partha Hazari was recently seen inside a voter's kitchen, rolling out rotis on a traditional clay oven after learning that the household had run out of cooking gas.

As party workers raised slogans outside, Hazari wielded the rolling pin with surprising ease before turning the impromptu culinary act into a political message.

"I have made rotis before, so I know a bit of the craft. Many families are struggling because gas cylinders are not available. I only tried to lend a helping hand," he said with a smile.

The imagery, a candidate kneading dough while asking for votes, quickly travelled across social media, adding another chapter to Bengal's colourful election folklore.

If Hazari's outreach came from the warmth of a kitchen hearth, a BJP candidate in Birbhum chose the edge of a barber's blade.

In Dubrajpur, sitting MLA Anup Saha paused during his campaign after spotting a roadside barber at work. Moments later, the saffron candidate was seated beside the stall, razor in hand, shaving a man's beard — a gesture meant to underline his claim of remaining "one among the people".

Saha had wrested Dubrajpur from the ruling party in the 2021 elections, one of the few seats where the BJP managed to plant its flag in TMC leader Anubrata Mondal's political backyard.

This time, the razor-sharp optics seemed aimed at reminding voters that, despite being an MLA, he still keeps his feet firmly on the ground.

Further south, in the forested belt of Jhargram, the BJP's Gopiballavpur candidate Rajesh Mahato opted for another register of public connect: faith.

Launching his campaign with a Hari naam sankirtan in the Patashimul region, Mahato joined villagers in devotional chants and even played with gulal during the gathering before moving on to door-to-door canvassing.

In the hyper-competitive electoral theatre of Bengal, such gestures — whether culinary, cultural or spiritual — are becoming part of a larger choreography where symbolism often carries as much weight as slogans.

Even the Left, once the most ideologically austere force in the state's politics, appears to be adapting to this new grammar of public engagement.

In Panihati, CPI(M)'s young candidate Kaltan Dasgupta began his campaign with prayers at the Mahotsavtala ghat temple dedicated to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a sight that would have been almost unthinkable during the Left Front's three-decade rule when communists projected a rigidly secular political identity.

Veterans recall earlier flashes of similar contradictions.

The late Subhas Chakraborty, who had been a senior CPI(M) leader and minister, once stirred debate within party ranks by offering prayers at the Tarapith temple, while the Hajj pilgrimage of ex-minister Rezzak Mollah had also raised ideological eyebrows.

Chakraborty himself had once captured the paradox in a line that has since become part of Bengal's political folklore: "First Mohammad, then Marx."

Political observers say the new generation of leaders across parties is less bound by ideological rigidity and more focused on optics and accessibility.

With polling scheduled in two phases on 23 April and 29 April, and counting on 4 May, the coming weeks could see even more inventive acts of public outreach.

After all, in Bengal's intensely theatrical politics, the campaign trail has never merely been about speeches. Sometimes, it is about who rolls the better roti, wields the sharper razor, or sings the loudest hymn.

Additionally, a BJP candidate on Sunday canvassed with a fish, a regular item in the Bengali diet, in his bid to invalidate the ruling TMC's campaign that the saffron camp would ban non-veg food if they are voted to power in West Bengal.

The unusual campaign of Sharadwat Mukhopadhyay of the Bidhannagar seat quickly went viral on social media.

Holding the large catla fish while interacting with voters in Bidhannagar, Mukhopadhyay dismissed the TMC's claim as false propaganda.

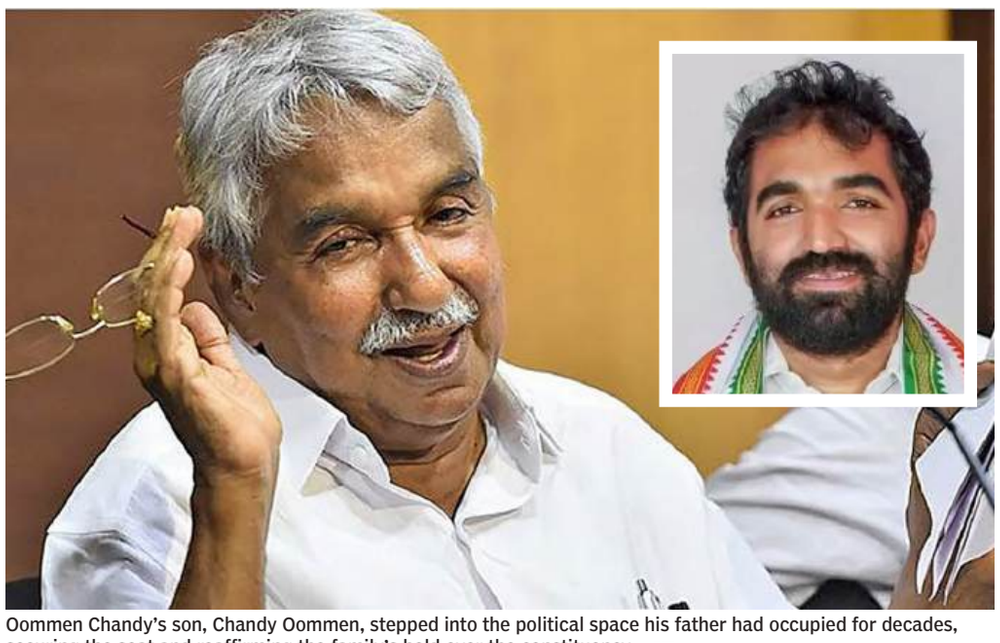
Several TMC leaders, including Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, have been consistently alleging that the BJP intends to interfere with Bengal's food culture if elected to power in the state. They cite the crackdown on the sale of fish and meat in some NDA-ruled states like Bihar and Gujarat, especially during certain festivals. —*PTI*

In Bengal's intensely theatrical politics, the campaign trail has never merely been about speeches. Sometimes, it is about who rolls the better roti, wields the sharper razor, or sings the loudest hymn —*AI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Chandy's legacy tested as son faces triangular contest in Kerala polls

- In the 2023 bypoll, the people of Puthuppally translated their sympathy and affection for Oommen Chandy into a margin of over 37,000 votes for his son, surpassing the former CM's own margin of around 9,000 votes in the 2021 Assembly polls. Chandy Oommen is determined to show that his mandate went beyond sympathy votes. To reinforce confidence, he has chosen to campaign without putting up a single flex board or poster in the constituency.



Oommen Chandy's son, Chandy Oommen, stepped into the political space his father had occupied for decades, securing the seat and reaffirming the family's hold over the constituency —*PTI*

For the first time in over five decades, an Assembly election in Kerala is unfolding without Oommen Chandy in the fray, a presence that had long defined the political rhythm of his constituency, Puthuppally, as well as the state.

The Congress stalwart's absence is not merely electoral; it is deeply personal for many in this central Kerala constituency.

Nearly three years after his demise, a steady stream of visitors continues to arrive at his tomb at St George Orthodox Church near his ancestral home here, offering quiet prayers — a testament to the bond he shared with ordinary people.

That emotional connection now forms a significant part of the Congress-led UDF's appeal among voters across the state.

In the bypoll that followed his death, his son, Chandy Oommen, stepped into the political space his father had occupied for decades, securing the seat and, in the process, reaffirming the family's hold over the constituency.

As Kerala heads to the 9 April polls, Chandy Oommen, contesting as the UDF candidate, speaks of continuity rather than change.

But his main rival — KS Radhakrishnan of the CPI(M) — says it is not going to be easy for the Chandy scion this time.

In the 2023 bypoll, the people of Puthuppally translated their sympathy and affection for Oommen Chandy into a margin of over 37,000 votes for his son, surpassing the former CM's own margin of around 9,000 votes in the 2021 Assembly polls.

Chandy Oommen is determined to show that his mandate went beyond sympathy votes. To reinforce confidence, he has chosen to campaign without putting up a single flex board or poster in the constituency.

"Puthuppally has all the basic infrastructure. My father, when he was MLA for 53 years, built Puthuppally from scratch. There are more than 60 big and small bridges. You can study here from LKG to M Tech," Chandy Oommen told PTI Videos.

"Now we have to go to the next level. That includes the development of sports infrastructure and the promotion of religious tourism," he added.

However, the LDF believes that Puthuppally is not an impregnable fortress and remains confident of bringing about change.

They point out that during Oommen Chandy's tenure, they managed to capture most of the panchayats in the constituency and succeeded in reducing his victory margin to below 10,000 votes in the 2021 Assembly polls.

Radhakrishnan, the LDF candidate for Puthuppally, is preparing to make his electoral debut in the upcoming polls.

"For the past 55 years, the UDF has continuously won the MLA seat here. The current MLA, as well as his father, former Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, have represented this constituency".

"He has served as chief minister and also held ministerial positions in various sectors. However, despite all this, the growth of Puthuppally over the last 55 years has not kept pace with Kerala's overall development. That is a serious concern," said Radhakrishnan.

"In the last local body elections, the margin between the LDF and UDF was only around 14,000 votes. Over the past three years, the current MLA has not intervened in any major developmental issues in the constituency," he added.

The BJP has also entered the fray, making it a triangular contest. The party has fielded Raveendranath Vakathanam, a party worker for the past 30 years, who says the BJP's growing influence is evident in the constituency and that people are seeking development.

"There is definitely an influence of the BJP here. For the past 12 years, the Centre has been under its rule, and development has reached many states. But Kerala has not utilised that opportunity. The people of Kerala want that development, and it is that aspiration which is driving support towards the BJP and the NDA," said Raveendranath.

After setbacks in the 2020 local body elections, the UDF bounced back strongly in 2025, winning control of seven of the eight grama panchayats in Puthuppally — a significant boost ahead of the Assembly elections.

The 2021 Assembly election in Puthuppally recorded a voter turnout of around 74.8 per cent. The constituency has a significant Christian population, particularly Syrian Christians, who have traditionally been a key support base for the UDF.

Prominent churches such as St George Orthodox Church and Manarcad St Mary's Jacobite Church are considered socially and politically influential in the region.

Chandy Oommen, who was not given significant recognition in the party's state leadership compared to other youth leaders, said the party has given him more than he could have asked for.

"What more can the party do for me? I have asked for nothing; they've given me everything. The party has given me the MLA ticket, the opportunity — every possible chance," he said. —*PTI*

Colombian military plane with 110 soldiers crashes

BOGOTA, 23 MARCH

A Colombian Air Force plane that was carrying 110 soldiers on board crashed while taking off near its southern border. Colombia's defence ministry confirmed this on Monday. According to local media reports, 110 soldiers were travelling aboard a Lockheed Martin Hercules C-130 military transport aircraft. Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said the accident occurred while the plane was taking off from Puerto Leguizamo, located near the border with Peru. He confirmed that the plane was transporting troops when it crashed just a few kilometres away from a residential area. However, the exact number of victims and the cause of the crash have not yet been determined, Sanchez said. The minister did not say if there had been any casualties but described the incident as "deeply sad". Rescue workers have been dispatched to the area. *—AGENCIES*

Imran Khan undergoes third eye procedure

LAHORE, 23 MARCH

Pakistan's former jailed prime minister Imran Khan, underwent a third eye procedure on Monday, hospital authorities confirmed. Khan, 73, was diagnosed with central retinal vein occlusion, as per a report submitted to the Supreme Court in January. At the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad he received his third dose of anti-VEGF intravitreal injection. The hospital said, "It is unlikely that a fourth injection will be administered," and the impact would be assessed in four weeks. Khan's lawyer revealed in January that he had lost 85 per cent of his vision. *—PTI*

Venezuela lobby: Rubio to testify in ex-roomie's trial

MIAMI, 23 MARCH

The federal trial of a former Miami congressman accused of secretly lobbying for Venezuela's government during the first Trump administration begins Monday with Secretary of State Marco Rubio set to testify over his interactions with his old friend. Prosecutors allege David Rivera was a hired gun for former president Nicolás Maduro, leveraging Republican connections from his time in Congress to push the White House to abandon its hard line on Venezuela's socialist government. Rivera, who at one time had been Rubio's roommate in Florida, allegedly persuaded then foreign minister Delcy Rodríguez — now Venezuela's Acting President — to award him a $50 million lobbying contract to be paid by state oil company PDVSA. *—PTI*

Iran threatens to start hitting Gulf power plants

A firefighter works to extinguish a fire at the site of a direct hit from an Iranian missile in Central Israel *—PTI*

Electricity, water at risk; nuke plant threatened

DUBAI, 23 MARCH

Tensions in West Asia escalated sharply on Monday as Iran warned it would strike power and desalination plants across the region if Donald Trump carries out threats to bomb Iranian energy infrastructure.

The warning, issued by Tehran and reinforced by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), puts both electricity and drinking water supplies in Gulf states at risk, as many facilities are integrated. Iran's semiofficial Fars News Agency published a list of potential targets, including the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant, in what appeared to be a veiled threat.

Simultaneously, large explosions rocked Tehran as the Israel Defence Forces launched a "wide-scale wave of strikes" targeting infrastructure. Iranian media reported damage across districts 1, 4, 11, 13 and 21, with blasts heard along Shahid Babaei Expressway, Pirouzi Street, Heravi Square and Hafez Street. Casualties were reported in multiple cities, including the death of a child in Khorramabad and extensive damage in Urmia.

The escalation follows Iran's continued missile and drone campaign, including strikes towards Dimona in Israel and attacks on US-linked installations such as Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. Air defences in the United Arab Emirates intercepted a ballistic missile near Al Dhafra Air Base, while sirens sounded in Bahrain and Kuwait. Riyadh said it had destroyed incoming missiles and drones over its oil-rich Eastern Province.

At the centre of the crisis is the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly a fifth of global oil passes. Iran has warned it could close the route "indefinitely" if attacked, while Trump has threatened to "obliterate" Iranian power plants if shipping is restricted.

Global energy markets have been rattled, with Brent crude rising over 50 per cent to around USD 112 per barrel since late February. Fatih Birol of the International Energy Agency said the disruption exceeds the impact of both the 1970s oil shocks and the Russia-Ukraine war combined.

US Central Command chief Brad Cooper said the campaign was "ahead or on plan" and accused Iran of launching attacks from populated areas, warning civilians to remain indoors.

Iran's death toll has surpassed 1,500, while at least 15 people have been killed in Israel. In Lebanon, strikes linked to the conflict have killed over 1,000 and displaced more than a million, raising fears of a broader regional war. *—Agencies*

'US strikes destroy Iran's turbine engine plant'

US Central Command said it destroyed Iran's Qom Turbine Engine Production Plant in airstrikes earlier this month, confirming the strike on March. The facility produced gas turbine engines for attack drones and aircraft components used by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Satellite images from 6 March and 9 March show the site before and after extensive damage. The operation aimed to degrade Iran's "one-way attack drone" capabilities and disrupt unmanned systems production.

WEST ASIA WAR

DAY-24

In the face of the risk of escalation spiraling out of control, it has become more necessary than ever for all warring parties to agree to a temporary halt to attacks on energy facilities and civilian infrastructure, and for Iran to restore freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz

—Emmanuel Macron, French President to Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince of Saudi

Smoke and flames rise from an Israeli airstrike that hit the Qasmiyeh Bridge near the coastal city of Tyre, Lebanon on Sunday *—PTI*

Israel hits Lebanon; Hezbollah retaliates

BEIRUT, 23 MARCH

A civilian has been killed and four others have sustained moderate injuries following an Israeli air strike on the "al Shahabiya district of Tyre" in southern Lebanon, according to Al Jazeera, citing Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA).

The strike caused "significant damage to a residential area," marking another escalation in the ongoing conflict.

This latest bombardment is part of a broader Israeli air campaign that began after Hezbollah "launched a cross-border attack on 2 March," following the outbreak of the "US-Israel war on Iran." Since the commencement of these hostilities, Israeli operations have "killed more than 1,000 people and displaced some one million" across the country.

The intensity of the conflict showed no signs of waning overnight, as Israeli jets "pounding Lebanon with air raids" targeted several locations.

Reports from the NNA, as relayed by Al Jazeera, indicate that strikes stretched from "Khiam and Nabatieh in the eastern section of the border" to the "municipality of Chehabiyeh near Tyre."

These aerial assaults are being conducted in tandem with a "ground operation" that remains "concentrated in a number of key locations in villages close to the Israeli border."

In response to the ground incursions, Hezbollah has maintained a high tempo of counter-offensives. Al Jazeera reports that the "group says it has carried out 63 operations" within the last 24 hours, a "record number" for a single day. *—ANI*

- The intensity of the conflict showed no signs of waning overnight, as Israeli jets "pounding Lebanon with air raids" targeted several locations.

US warns Americans worldwide

WASHINGTON DC, 23 MARCH

The US Department of State on Saturday issued a worldwide warning for its citizens, saying that Iranian supporters may attack US citizens.

The warning said that citizens must follow guidance in issued by the nearest US embassy or consulate.

In its "Worldwide Caution" the Department of State advises Americans, especially in the Middle East, to exercise increased caution. "Americans abroad should follow the guidance in security alerts issued by the nearest US embassy or consulate. Periodic airspace closures may cause travel disruptions," it said.

US diplomatic facilities, including outside the Middle East, have been targeted. Groups supportive of Iran may target other US interests overseas or locations associated with the United States and/or Americans throughout the world, the alert further said even as it issued a link for its citizens to enrol to get the latest security alerts.

"Enroll at http://step.state.gov to receive the latest security alerts and follow the "U.S. Department of State - Security Updates for U.S. Citizens" channel on WhatsApp or @TravelGov on X. When planning travel, carefully read the Travel Advisory and detailed information for your destination, and any recent alerts at http://travel.state.gov/destination."

The warning comes as the US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Monday said that President Donald Trump is defanging the Iranian regime and bringing peace to the Middle East.

Bessent said that Trump's actions are aimed at making the world a safer place. *—ANI*

Iranian-Americans chant and carry signs during a protest against the Iranian regime at the Federal Building in Los Angeles on Sunday *—PTI*

- In its "Worldwide Caution", the United States Department of State advised American citizens, especially those in West Asia, to exercise increased caution and follow security alerts.

DISMANTLE REGIME, SPARE INFRA: PAHLAVI

Iran's Exiled crowned prince Reza Pahlavi on Saturday asserted that Iran is not the Islamic Republic, adding that the regime here must be dismantled.

Pahlavi appealed to United States President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to continue targeting the regime and its apparatus of repression, while sparing the civilian infrastructure.

"Iran is not the Islamic Republic. Iran's civilian infrastructure belongs to the Iranian people and to the future of a free Iran. The Islamic Republic's infrastructure is the machinery of repression and terror used to keep that future from becoming reality. Iran must be protected. The regime must be dismantled," the exiled prince claimed in a post on the social media site X. *—ANI*

FORMER CIA CHIEF BLAMES TRUMP FOR WAR

Criticising US President Donald Trump for striking Iran, former CIA director Leon Panetta said the country is now 'stuck with no way out' of the conflict. He warned that Washington is finding itself in a difficult situation after weeks of escalation. He said Trump is stuck between 'a rock and a hard place.' He said US officials have known for years that Iran could disrupt global oil supplies by blocking the Strait of Hormuz. *– Agencies*

New videos show guards skipped checks before Epstein's death

WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

Newly released US Department of Justice (DOJ) surveillance video from Manhattan's Metropolitan Correctional Centre shows guards skipping the mandatory checks on the night sex-trafficker **Jeffrey Epstein** died by suicide on 10 August 2019.

Instead of conducting mandatory 3 am rounds, correctional officers Tova Noel and Michael Thomas are seen on video walking and using their phones near Epstein's cell at 3.15am. The pair were accused of falsifying records to claim they had performed checks throughout the night.

Although both were fired, criminal charges against them were dropped in 2021 by US District Court Judge Analisa Torres, an appointee of the Obama administration.

DOJ documents reveal that guards ignored bright-orange warnings and reminders plastered on their computers by the officer in charge of the Special Housing Unit. These notes specified that Epstein was recently off suicide watch and required regular check-ins. *—Agencies*

40 dead during Eid in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Emergency service dealt with 1,914 cases during Eid *—SCREENGRAB*

PESHAWAR, 23 MARCH

Around 40 deaths were reported in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province during two days of the Eid holidays, officials said on Monday.

The national emergency service Rescue 1122 said that it responded to a total of 1,914 emergencies during the festive period. The emergency teams handled 1,261 medical cases, 62 fire incidents, 33 cases related to fights and crime, five drowning incidents, and 50 other emergencies, Rescue 1122 said.

A total of 40 fatalities were reported in various incidents, while 1,993 other individuals were provided medical assistance during those 48 hours. Among the total incidents reported, 484 were road traffic accidents, due to a surge in travel-related incidents during Eid celebrations.The national emergency service added that the leaves of officials were cancelled to ensure uninterrupted services throughout the province.

Authorities urged the public to remain cautious during the the holidays. *—PTI*

COLUMBUS STATUE AT WH

A statue of Christopher Columbus has been installed on the grounds of White House, reflecting Donald Trump's continued support for the explorer's legacy. While many hail Columbus as a historic figure, critics view him as a symbol of colonial violence against Indigenous people. The move comes amid ongoing debate in the US, where Columbus Day has increasingly been replaced by Indigenous Peoples' Day *—SCREENGRAB*

ANTISEMETIC HATE CRIME

4 Jewish charity ambulances set on fire in London

LONDON, 23 MARCH

Four ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity in London were set on fire in London on Monday morning. British police are investigating the incident as a hate crime.

The ambulances belonging to Hatzola Northwest, a volunteer organisation providing emergency medical response, were damaged, according to the London fire brigade. Multiple cylinders on the vehicles exploded, causing windows to break in an adjacent apartment block. The force said no injuries have been reported, and the fire has been brought under control.

Officers were called to Golders Green, a London neighbourhood with a large Jewish population, after receiving reports of a fire, the Metropolitan Police force said. Nearby homes were evacuated as a precautionary measure.

Police said reports of explosions were linked to gas canisters on the ambulances. The cause of the fire is being investigated, Police Superintendent Sarah Jackson said. She added that the police are looking for three suspects, but no arrests have been made yet.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the "deeply shocking" antisemitic arson attack. "My thoughts are with the Jewish community who are waking up this morning to this horrific news," he said. Shomrim, a nonprofit organisation that operates a neighbourhood watch in the area, also condemned the attack.

The number of antisemitic incidents reported in the UK has soared since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in 2023, according to the Community Security Trust, which works to protect the Jewish community. The group recorded 3,700 incidents in 2025, up from 1,662 in 2022. *—PTI*

Burnt wreckage of four ambulances of a Jewish organisation Hatzola Northwest in North London on Monday *—PTI*

2 pilots dead as plane, truck collide at New York airport

NEW YORK, 23 MARCH

An Air Canada jet collided with a firetruck on the runway at New York's LaGuardia Airport late Sunday, killing the pilot and copilot. About 40 passengers and crew members were injured.

The aircraft—a Jazz Aviation flight operating for Air Canada—carried 72 passengers and four crew members. The flight originated at Montréal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport, the major airport serving Montreal.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey stated that the jet struck a rescue and firefighting vehicle responding to a separate incident at approximately 11.45pm. Officials confirmed the airport will remain closed until at least 2pm Monday to facilitate the investigation.

Air traffic control (ATC) audio captures a controller shouting, "Stop, stop, stop, Truck 1!" seconds before the collision.

The panic-stricken commands suggest the crash occurred moments later.

Photos and videos from the scene showed severe damage to the front of the aircraft, with cables and debris hanging from a mangled cockpit. Nearby, a damaged emergency vehicle lay on its side.

Stairways used to evacuate passengers were pushed up to the emergency exits on the jet — a Bombardier CRJ.

The impact left the plane with its crumpled nose tilted upward. *—Agencies*

An Air Canada Jet sits on the runway at LaGuardia Airport in New York on Monday after colliding with a firefighting vehicle after landing *—PTI*

Indian Bank raises Rs 5K cr through infra bonds

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

State-run Indian Bank said on Monday that it has raised Rs 5,000 crore through a 10 year, long-term infrastructure bond issue at a coupon rate of 7.15 per cent. The lender received two bids for a cumulative amount of Rs 3,100 crore at 7.13 per cent coupon, two bids each for a cumulative value of Rs 4,100 crore and Rs 5,050 crore, with a coupon rate of 7.14 per cent and 7.15 per cent, respectively. Additionally, the bank received one bid for a cumulative amount of Rs 5,075 crore, market participants added. The bank planned to raise Rs 5,000 crore in the greenshoe option. The bonds are rated 'AAA' with a 'Stable' outlook. *—PTI*

Hindustan Zinc, Tata tie up for low-carbon zinc

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc Ltd on Monday said it has partnered with Tata Steel to expand its use of its low-carbon zinc solution — EcoZen — in steel manufacturing. EcoZen is produced using renewable energy and has a verified carbon footprint of less than one tonne of carbon dioxide (CO_2) equivalent per tonne of zinc, which is about 75 per cent lower than the global industry average. By significantly reducing emissions at the raw material stage, EcoZen enables downstream industries to lower value-chain emissions and advance their decarbonisation goals. Zinc galvanises steel to protect against corrosion. The partnership highlights both firms' resolve to weave climate priorities into their core operations and sourcing strategies. *—PTI*

7 coal gasification projects to boost energy security

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy told the Rajya Sabha on Monday that seven coal gasification projects, costing Rs 64,000 crore, will be launched in Maharashtra, Odisha, and West Bengal to reduce energy imports. Reddy said the coal blocks are being allotted through a transparent auction process."There is no shortage of power in the country," he said, adding that 73-74 per cent of electricity is being generated through coal-based thermal plants. The minister said 80 per cent of coal production is being supplied to the power sector and the remaining to other sectors. Reddy highlighted that India is the second-largest producer and consumer of coal. Reddy said the government has also started coal gasification activities. *—PTI*

Adobe names Shamik Basu as Vice Prez for India

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Adobe on Monday announced the appointment of Shamik Basu as Vice President, Creative Products Group in India. Basu will lead Adobe India's engineering and product management teams, reporting to Ely Greenfield, chief technology officer of the group. With over 8,000 employees across four campuses, India is Adobe's second-largest workforce globally and contributes over a third of the company's innovation agenda. Basu's experience building intelligent, large-scale platforms will strengthen local leadership, deepen global alignment and power the next phase of Adobe's growth, Greenfield noted. Basu will work closely with global leaders on products like Adobe Firefly and more. He has three decades of experience in building intelligent software platforms.*—PTI*

Investors lost Rs 48.29L crore since Iran war started

Sensex tumbled 10.56% & Nifty lost 10.58% since the conflict

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Investors' wealth has eroded by a whopping Rs 48.29 lakh crore since the start of the West Asia war, sending shock waves across global markets and driving the BSE Sensex lower by 10.56 per cent.

Since the conflict began, the BSE benchmark Sensex has tumbled 8,590.8 points or 10.56 per cent, and the 50 share NSE Nifty lost 2,666 points or 10.58 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 48.29 lakh crore (Rs 48,29,041.45 crore) to Rs 415 lakh crore (Rs 4,15,21,629.82 crore) since then.

The war in the Middle East nearly closed the Strait of Hormuz - the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that connects the oil and gas-producing Gulf countries to the rest of the world.

"The deepening Strait of Hormuz crisis, sustained pressure on the rupee, elevated energy prices, and continued foreign outflows are collectively driving a negative sentiment cycle," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

On Monday, the Sensex dived 1,836.57 points or 2.46 per cent to settle at 72,696.39. The Nifty tanked 601.85 points or 2.60 per cent to end at 22,512.65.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Titan tumbled the most by 6.24 per cent. Trent, UltraTech Cement, Bharat Electronics, InterGlobe Aviation, Tata Steel, and HDFC Bank were also among the major laggards.

HCL Tech, Power Grid, Infosys, and Tech Mahindra were the winners.The BSE MidCap Select index tanked 3.82 per cent, and the SmallCap Select index plunged 3.66 per cent.

All sectoral indices ended lower. Consumer durables tumbled 4.91 per cent, metal (4.76 per cent), realty (4.75 per cent), services (4.70 per cent), BSE PSU Bank (4.39 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (4.37 per cent), commodities (4.35 per cent), industrials (4.05 per cent) and capital goods (3.99 per cent).

A total of 3,798 stocks declined while 635 advanced and 123 remained unchanged on the BSE. The sharp fall was driven by weak global cues and rising crude prices. *—PTI*

LIQUIDITY-DRIVEN SELLING

Gold futures fall 10% to Rs 1.29 L/10g amid global rout

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Gold prices plummeted sharply by more than 10 per cent to Rs 1.29 lakh per 10 grams in futures trade on Monday amid a global sell-off in precious metals driven by macroeconomic pressures.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the yellow metal dived by Rs 14,897, or 10.3 per cent, to Rs 1,29,595 per 10 grams. The yellow metal has now declined by Rs 63,501, or nearly 33 per cent, from its all-time high of Rs 1,93,096 per 10 grams recorded on 29 January.

Analysts said the sharp fall was triggered by rising inflation fears and a surge in crude oil prices. Gaurav Garg, research analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk said that a stronger US dollar and rising bond yields have led to liquidity-driven selling, overshadowing the traditional safe-haven appeal of gold.

Last week, gold had dropped Rs 13,974, or 8.82 per cent, to close at around Rs 1.44 lakh per 10 grams in the domestic market. Globally, gold futures for the April contract depreciated USD 474.9, or 10.4 per cent, to hit an intraday low of USD 4,100 per ounce.

Over the past week, gold futures plunged USD 486.8, or 9.6 per cent, to settle at USD 4,574.9 per ounce. Gold witnessed an aggressive correction last week, plunging nearly USD 500, its steepest weekly drop since 1983, and is now down nearly 17 per cent over the past three weeks, Renisha Chainani, head of research at Augmont, said.

She noted that the sell-off has been driven by forced liquidation and cash raising by institutional players. Gold may see further profit-booking, though short-covering and rebound up to USD 4,750 per ounce cannot be ruled out. *—PTI*

Crude oil declines 9% to Rs 8,431 per barrel

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Crude oil prices pared early gains to decline 9 per cent to Rs 8,431 per barrel in futures trade, after US President Donald Trump announced a temporary halt to military strikes on Iran's energy infrastructure.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for the April delivery initially opened higher and gained Rs 362, or 4 per cent, to hit an intraday high of Rs 9,620 per barrel.

However, prices later reversed sharply, plunging Rs 827, or 9 per cent, to Rs 8,431 per barrel -- its lower circuit limit.

Analysts said the sharp reversal came after easing geopolitical tensions following the US decision to pause potential strikes on Iranian energy facilities.

Crude prices also tumbled in the overseas markets. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures for the May contract declined USD 7.24, or 7.37 per cent, to USD 90.99 per barrel, while Brent for the same month delivery dropped USD 6.70, or 6.30 per cent, to USD 99.71 per barrel in New York.

Trump instructed the Department of War to postpone all military strikes against Iran for a five-day period.

Trump had warned Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours or face military action on its key energy.

The temporary de-escalation has eased supply disruption fears, triggering profit-booking and a sharp correction in oil prices. *—PTI*

Benchmark bond yield reaches 14-month high

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Indian benchmark bond yields reached a 14-month high on Monday, amid rising Brent crude prices due to escalating West Asia conflict.

The 10-year government bond yield was at 6.8173 per cent, compared to 6.737 per cent on Friday, the highest since 14 January 2025, data shows.

"Bond yields are rising in response to crude oil prices climbing above USD 110 amid escalating tensions between the US-Israel and Iran," said Mataprasad Pandey, vice-president at Arete Capital (Choice Group).

He added that higher crude prices fuel inflation fears and strain India's trade and current account balances, negatively impacting the depreciating rupee, approaching 94.

These factors dampen expectations of a rate cut and may prompt a rate hike if geopolitical tensions persist. *—PTI*

DOWN 50 PAISE

Rupee slumps to fresh low of 94.03 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

The rupee breached the 94/dollar barrier for the first time, slumping 50 paise to a new record closing low of 94.03 (provisional) against the greenback on Monday.

A strengthening US dollar and a steep decline in the domestic equity markets further weakened the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 93.84 and kept losing ground throughout the day, before breaching the 94-mark against the US dollar for the first time to settle at 94.03 (provisional), down 50 paise from its previous close.

The rupee went past the 93-mark against the greenback on 20 March after crashing 64 paise to settle at 93.53.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias as deteriorating global sentiments and geopolitical tensions may keep the rupee under pressure. However, time-to-time intervention by the Reserve Bank may support the rupee at lower levels," Anuj Choudhary, research analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said, adding that the USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 93.60-94.40.

- At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 93.84 and kept losing ground throughout the day, before breaching the 94-mark against the US dollar for to settle at 94.03.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.14 per cent higher at 99.78.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 1.11 per cent lower at USD 113.4 per barrel in futures trade. *—PTI*

PAYTM SET FOR HIGH GROWTH AS JEFFERIES RETAINS 'BUY' RATING

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Paytm, operated by One 97 Communications, continues to maintain a dominant merchant payments platform, which is expected to drive its growth over the next two years, brokerage Jefferies said on Monday.

The brokerage retained its 'Buy' rating on the stock with a target price of Rs 1,350, projecting a 22 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in revenue between FY26 and FY28, along with expansion in adjusted EBITDA margins.

Jefferies said Paytm's merchant platform is rapidly emerging as the largest in India across online and offline channels, supporting higher payment volumes and faster loan origination, with an active base of 45 million merchants benefiting from rising subscription device penetration and operating leverage.

Payments gross merchandise value (GMV) is forecast to grow at 23 per cent CAGR over FY26 to FY28, reaching Rs 35 lakh crore by FY28 from Rs 24 lakh crore estimated for FY26, supported by 13 million installed Soundbox devices.

The company has also piloted an artificial intelligence-powered conversational Soundbox across 10,000 outlets and may maintain pricing to strengthen market share, the report noted.

Paytm's merchant lending business is outpacing retail lending and offers better take rates, while highlighting long-term potential in credit on UPI. *—PTI*

Sebi makes IPO disclosure investor-friendly

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

- The regulator said the document will present key information including the company's business model, financials, promoters, risks, and key performance indicators in a simplified and easy-to-understand format..The abridged prospectus will be made available on the websites of issuers, stock exchanges, and lead managers to ensure easier access for investors in the country.

Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has introduced a concise and standardised summary of offer documents in the form of a draft abridged prospectus to make initial public offering (IPO) disclosures accessible and investor-friendly.

IPO-bound companies will now have to submit this abridged prospectus alongside their detailed offer documents.

The regulator said the document will present key information including the company's business model, financials, promoters, risks, and key performance indicators in a simplified and easy-to-understand format..

The abridged prospectus will be made available on the websites of issuers, stock exchanges, and lead managers to ensure easier access for investors.

The changes are part of Sebi's move to enhance disclosure standards and streamline information available during public offerings.

Sebi said that issuers are required to provide QR codes and links in application forms and public advertisements to allow investors easy access to the red herring prospectus, abridged prospectus, and price band details.

Sebi has also prescribed word limits to ensure clarity in disclosures and amended the Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements (ICDR) Regulations, 2018.

Sebi's board had approved a focused, concise and standardised summary of offer documents to be available at the DRHP stage. *—PTI*

MAN WHO CHANGED PORN

Onlyfans owner Leonid Radvinsky dies of cancer

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Leonid Radvinsky, owner of adult-content platform OnlyFans, died of cancer at the age of 43 on Monday.

"We are deeply saddened to announce the death of Leo Radvinsky. Leo passed away peacefully after a long battle with cancer," an OnlyFans spokesperson was cited as saying by news agency Reuters.

His is family have requested privacy at this difficult time, the spokesperson further said.

Radvinsky, a Ukrainian-born US citizen, bought Fenix International Limited, the parent company of OnlyFans, in 2018. He was serving as the majority shareholder and director of Fenix International.

Founded in 2016 by British entrepreneur Tim Stokely, OnlyFans is a subscription-based adult entertainment platform. The platform became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic as the lockdown pushed more consumers online.

Radvinsky was also the founder of the adult cam site, MyFreeCams and ran a venture capital fund 'Leo', which he founded in 2009 that focuses primarily on investments in technology companies.

His cancer battle was not known to the public. Radvinsky was a prominent donor to medical causes. In 2024, he and his wife were major supporters of a USD 23 million grant program for cancer research through a gastrointestinal research foundation.

OnlyFans was reportedly exploring the sale of a majority stake to investment firm Architect Capital—*Agencies*

CoinDCX founders arrested in Rs 71.6 lakh fraud case

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

The Thane police have arrested cryptocurrency exchange platform CoinDCX co-founders Sumit Gupta and Neeraj Khandelwal in connection with an alleged fraud of Rs 71.6 lakh.

The company, however, claimed the FIR was false, and there was a conspiracy against CoinDCX by impersonators posing as its founders and cheating the public.

The arrests were made following an FIR registered in Maharashtra's Thane city against CoinDCX co-founders Gupta, Khandelwal and others on charges of cheating, criminal breach of trust and fraud, officials said.

A 42-year-old insurance advisor alleged that he was duped of Rs 71.6 lakh between August 2025 and March this year after being lured by promises of high returns by investing in a firm, purportedly associated with the cryptocurrency platform. He was also offered a franchise opportunity.

The complainant, a resident of Mumbra, transferred Rs 71,60,015 through cash and online transactions at different times. However, the invested amount was not returned, and instead the funds were allegedly misappropriated.

A police team apprehended Gupta and Khandelwal from Bengluru. They were later produced before a local court in Thane, which remanded them in police custody. *—PTI*

-PTI

Asian Team Squash Championship postponed

KARACHI, 23 MARCH

The Asian Team Squash Championship scheduled in Islamabad next month has been postponed due to the ongoing conflict in the Gulf region. The event was scheduled to be held from 14 to 18 April. "The Asian Squash Federation has informed us that it is not feasible to hold the event at this time because of the conflict and the resulting situation in the region," said an official. He said that if the situation improves, the Pakistan Squash Federation will look at a window sometime in September. Asked if the Indian squash federation had agreed to send its team for the event, the official said that the confirmation of teams participating in the championship is being handled by the continental body.—*PTI*

T20 World Cup 2026 drives cricket's rise as a global sport

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India remains the "anchor market," but cricket is becoming "incontrovertibly" globalised, said ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta as he applauded the "fearless" performance of Associate countries during the recent T20 World Cup, describing their growth as the "signal of a maturing" global sport. India won the tournament, which featured 20 teams and was dotted with some gutsy shows by lesser-fancied sides like tournament debutant Italy, USA, Nepal, and Zimbabwe. India is indeed the anchor market of world cricket. Its enormous fan base, financial strength, and time-tested affinity for the sport provide a platform that benefits the entire ecosystem.—*PTI*

-PTI

Arundhati Reddy and Farhan win Player of Month

DUBAI, 23 MARCH

India medium pacer Arundhati Reddy was on Monday named the ICC Player of the Month for February for her fine performances in a T20I series in Australia. Pakistan opener Sahibzada Farhan was named the ICC Player of the Month for his extraordinary performances in the men's T20 World Cup. Reddy shone with her fine seam bowling Down Under, helping India win their three-match T20I series against Australia 2-1. She was the leading wicket-taker in the series with hauls of 4/22, 2/30, and 2/35, finishing with an average of 10.87 and an economy rate of 7.25. "It's a real honour to be named ICC Player of the Month.—*PTI*

Warner, Smith and others get a warning to leave PSL

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

An armed opposition group in Pakistan, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, has issued a public statement warning overseas stars such as David Warner, Steve Smith, and Daryl Mitchell against participating. In a chilling ultimatum, the group stated that players' safety cannot be guaranteed if they travel to Pakistan for the T20 league. The fate of the 2026 Pakistan Super League (PSL) season appears to be in jeopardy, despite the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) reportedly deciding to host the event in only two cities, and behind closed doors. PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi confirmed the government directive, citing the West Asia conflict and soaring fuel prices as the primary reasons behind the decision.—*PTI*

New-look India aim to set tone for season at AC in Bangkok

BANGKOK, 23 MARCH

India will kick-start the new international archery season with a fresh-faced squad at the Asia Cup Stage 1, banking on a blend of exciting teenagers and returning veterans instead of established stars in the tournament beginning here on Tuesday.

The team will be without Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat, Dhiraj Bommadevara, Tarundeep Rai, Jyothi Surekha Vennam, and Abhishek Verma as the Indian think-tank wants to use the continental opener to test bench strength ahead of a packed season culminating in the Asian Games in Japan come September-October.

The top Indian archers, however, will be back in action with the World Cup's first two legs in Puebla (Mexico) and Shanghai, from April onwards. Despite the absence of its marquee archers, the overall champions would be firm favourites. In the last year's opening leg, India topped the tally with eight medals, including five gold. The team will look to maintain its dominance on the Asia Cup circuit, which has been missed by the world heavyweights, South Korea.

In Korea's case, India's main rivals would be China and Bangladesh.

In the recurve men's section, Australia's Ryan Tyack is the top-ranked archer with a ranking of world No.27, while the women's section has Russian-born neutral athlete Nurinisso Makhmudova (No. 45) as the highest-ranked archer.

The spotlight will firmly be on the formidable Indian men's compound unit, spearheaded by world No.4 Rishabh Yadav alongside Asian Games gold medallist Prathamesh Jawkar and the seasoned Rajat Chauhan. —*PTI*

I don't like it: Axar on Impact Player rule in IPL

Rajat Patidar to lead Bengaluru title defence

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

An all-rounder himself, Axar Patel on Monday became the latest Indian cricketer to criticise the Impact Player rule in the IPL with a blunt "I don't like it" response before insisting that it hurts the growth of his tribe.

Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya have spoken against the Impact Player rule, which allows teams to substitute anyone in the playing XI with one of the five listed substitutes at any point of the match. It was introduced in 2023 and will stay until at least 2027.

In 2024, Rohit had said that he was not a fan of the strategic rule, saying it hampered the development of all-rounders in Indian cricket, while the following season, Hardik said it had become too difficult to pick an all-rounder in the side unless he was equally good with both bat and ball.

"I don't like this rule as I am an all-rounder myself (laughs). Earlier, we used to pick all-rounder for this role (batting and bowling). Now, team management goes with a particular batter or bowler, they say why do we need an all-rounder?

"Being an all-rounder myself, I don't like it, but at the same time, rules are rules. We have to follow them. But personally, I don't like it," said Axar.

Rajat Patidar -PTI

Axar Patel -PTI

The nineteenth season of the Indian Premier League is set to begin when Royal Challengers Bengaluru takes on Sunrisers Hyderabad at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on 28 March.

RCB will be led by **Rajat Patidar**, who skippered the team to the title in 2025, while SRH will be led by Ishan Kishan in the absence of full-time captain Pat Cummins.

Only one team, the Rajasthan Royals, has made a change in its captaincy this season, with Riyan Parag taking over from the departing Sanju Samson permanently. The Royals are also one of two teams to make a change in the position of head coach, with Kumar Sangakkara taking over from Rahul Dravid.

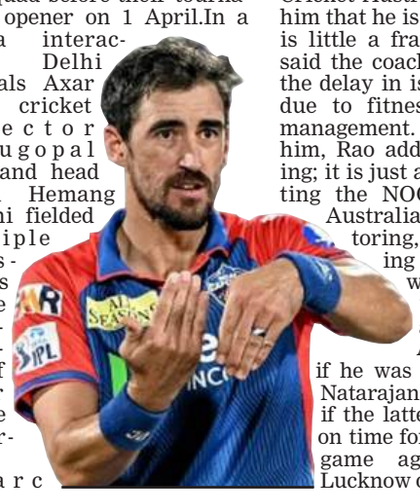
The other team to make a similar change is the Kolkata Knight Riders, where Abhishek Nayar has replaced Chandrakant Pandit. —*PTI*

AUSTRALIA IS YET TO ISSUE NOC

DC say Starc is hopeful of his arrival before IPL opener

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Cricket Australia is yet to grant a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to Mitchell Starc for his IPL stint with Delhi Capitals, the franchise said on Monday, but remains hopeful the lead pacer will join the squad before their tournament opener on 1 April.In a media interaction, Delhi Capitals Axar Patel, cricket director Venugopal Rao, and head coach Hemang Badani fielded multiple questions on the availability of their pace spearhead. Starc had taken 14 wickets in 11 games last season."We are waiting to get the NOC from Cricket Australia. Once we get that, we will know when he will join us," said Badani."We are in constant touch with CA. He has been bowling; he had bowled a few days back. Unless Cricket Australia signs off on him that he is fit to play, there is little a franchise can do," said the coach when asked if the delay in issuing NOC was due to fitness or workload management. Sitting next to him, Rao added, "He is coming; it is just a question of getting the NOC from Cricket Australia. They are monitoring, we are monitoring (his fitness and workload). "Flanked by Rao and Badani, Axar was asked if he was ready to play T Natarajan in Starc's place if the latter doesn't arrive on time for the team's first game against LSG in Lucknow on April 1. —*PTI*



Carlos Alcaraz loses to Sebastian Korda in the 3rd round

MIAMI, 23 MARCH

Carlos Alcaraz was eliminated in the third round of the Miami Open on Sunday, losing to Sebastian Korda in three sets.

The 22-year-old Alcaraz, who completed the career Grand Slam when he won the Australian Open in January, dropped to 17-2 this season. The No. 1 player in the men's rankings also lost to Daniil Medvedev in the semifinals at Indian Wells last weekend.

Korda served for the match at 5-4 in the second, but Alcaraz rallied by winning five consecutive games. The 25-year-old Korda then regrouped and closed out a 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 victory in two hours, 19 minutes.

"It was a tough match, obviously," Alcaraz said. "I think (Korda) was incredible today. Played such a great game. A lot of tied moments that I just didn't make the most of it, and I think he was better on (those) points and (those) moments."

At No. 36, Korda became the lowest-ranked man to beat Alcaraz since No. 55 David Goffin accomplished the feat in the second round in Miami last year, according to the ATP Tour.

"A lot of tense moments, for sure," Korda said. "But you know, I think today, the ultimate thing was belief. Going back to just believing, committing to every shot, and luckily, I got it done at the end."

Next up for Korda is qualifier Martin Landaluce, who advanced with a 6-3, 7-6 (2) win against 14th-seeded Karen Khachanov.

Americans Taylor Fritz and Tommy Paul joined Korda in the fourth round. The sixth-seeded Fritz beat Reilly Opelka 6-3, 6-4, and No. 22 seed Paul eliminated Raphael Collignon with a 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (5) victory.

Sebastian Korda beat Carlos Alcaraz for the second in six meetings -*MIAMI*

Aryna Sabalenka continues dominant run

Aryna Sabalenka is once again showing why she is the World No. 1 on the WTA Tour. The Belarusian star delivered a strong performance at the Miami Open 2026, defeating American player Caty McNally in straight sets to move into the Round of 16.

The victory continues Sabalenka's impressive hard-court form this season, following her recent major title win and several dominant performances against top opponents.

Sabalenka advanced to the next round of the Miami Open with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Caty McNally. The match lasted just around 1 hour and 20 minutes, with Sabalenka taking control after a competitive start.

McNally started well and tried to challenge the top seed early in the match.

However, Sabalenka's powerful baseline game and strong forehand eventually proved too difficult to handle. After winning a tight first set, Sabalenka raised her level in the second set and closed the match comfortably. —*PTI*

IPL FEVER IN BENGALURU

Fans gear up for the Indian Premier League season outside M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on Monday. A man checks the stadium map as a man hangs posters of Royal Challengers Bengaluru ahead of the matches, while RCB jerseys are seen being sold outside the venue. Ticket prices for RCB's home games range from Rs 2,300–Rs 3,750 for basic seating to over Rs 65,000 for premium categories -*MOHAMMED ASAD*

YOU CANNOT BE PLAYING SURROUNDED BY WARSHIPS: HUMPY

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Indian chess great Koneru Humpy stood firm on her decision to pull out of the Candidates tournament in Cyprus later this month, saying one cannot be "surrounded by warships" and still play peacefully, while asserting she is "not scared" of penalties and is not playing for monetary benefits.

Humpy, the two-time World Rapid champion and one of four Indians set to compete in the Candidates in Cyprus from March 28, pulled out of the prestigious event, citing safety concerns amid the ongoing Gulf conflict, given the island's proximity to the volatile region.

Earlier this month, a drone strike on a UK base heightened fears in the region,

prompting Humpy to pull out. She has since been replaced by Ukrainian Grandmaster Anna Muzychuk."You can't play surrounded by warships, which are guarding the island (Cyprus). If a foreigner like me, being a woman, if I have to travel and that too for such an important tournament, how can I play peacefully?" Humpy told PTI on Monday.

With her late withdrawal, Humpy is the only one among the 16 contestants eight in the Open and eight in the women's section to pull out. —*PTI*

Vinlcius scores twice to lead Real Madrid

BARCELONA, 23 MARCH

The cheers were back for Vinicius Junior at the Santiago Bernabeu after the Real Madrid forward scored twice in a 3-2 win over Atletico Madrid on Sunday night, keeping his team in the thick of the La Liga title race.

Vinícius had to endure jeers from Madrid's fans earlier this season following the firing of coach Xabi Alonso and some embarrassing losses.

But as the results have improved, so has Vinícius' reception from Madrid's supporters. Madrid has reached a high mark under new coach Álvaro Arbeloa with the win over Atletico after a humiliating 5-2 loss in September and the elimination of Pep Guardiola's Manchester City in the Champions League.

And Vinícius has rightfully gotten some credit for the team's recent improvement in form as he has helped to lead Madrid along with midfielder Federico Valverde, with stars Kylian Mbappé and Jude Bellingham out injured.

Vinícius converted a penalty in the 52nd minute to cancel out Ademola Lookman's first-half opener for Atletico before the speedy Madrid forward grabbed the winner with a curling strike in the 72nd.

"Another great game by Vini, it was an example of his character, his talent. It was a great goal that gave us a win in a difficult moment. —*PTI*

Injured Chiesa dropped by Italy before FIFA WC 2026

BARCELONA, 23 MARCH

Federico Chiesa has been dropped by Italy after being found not fit to play in the Azzurri's FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifying playoff with Northern Ireland, the country's football federation (FIGC) said on Monday.

Liverpool forward Chiesa "was not considered available for the coming two matches", said the FIGC, referring to Thursday's semifinal with Northern Ireland and a potential final against Wales or Bosnia-Herzegovina next week. Italy faces Northern Ireland in Bergamo, desperately trying to get through the playoffs and not miss out on a third consecutive World Cup finals. —*PTI*

NEW ERA

Indian indoor athletics begins in Bhubaneswar

BHUBANESWAR, 23 MARCH

India will formally begin its tryst with narrower tracks and consistent conditions of indoor athletics by hosting the format's maiden national championship starting here on Tuesday, taking the first preparatory step towards conducting the world championship at the same venue in two years.

The state-of-the-art facility here was last week named as the venue for the World Indoor Athletics Championships to be held from March 3-5, 2028. It would be the first time that the country will be hosting a global track and field showpiece.

The national championship would be a two-day affair at the facility that was inaugurated in 2024.

Indoor athletics has been a lesser-known aspect of the sport in the country, though some Indians have been competing at the international stage. This has to do, in large part, with the lack of top-class indoor facilities in the country.

In indoor events, athletes run on tracks that are narrower and have banked turns. The outdoor 400m tracks are wider and have flat turns.

Indoor events are not affected by wind, and the weather conditions are consistent throughout the duration of the competition.Familiar faces like star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable will not compete here as their events are not in the roster. —*PTI*